

L 2653-1 (3)

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for two weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



Public Library
Kansas City, Mo.

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

BENKOWITZ ENVELOPE CO., K. C., MO.

SECRET

3 1148 01134 4199

11/26/38

THE FLEET IN THE FOREST

A Novel

The **FLEET**
in the **FOREST**

by

CARL D. LANE

COWARD-McCANN, INC., NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1943, BY CARL D. LANE

All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, must not be reproduced in any form without permission.

This book is published on the same day in the Dominion of Canada by Longmans, Green & Company, Toronto.

This complete copyright edition is produced in full compliance with the Government's regulations for conserving paper and other essential materials.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To
My Mother

I. THE LAUNCH	3
II. THE TRIALS	125
III. THE VOYAGE	319

Noble Ship and Noble Man—each straight of keel and true of build, each tried in storm and tide and peril lest they perish on the voyage. For each the goal is freedom; for the ship to live and sail and laugh, for the man to dream and build and love, both proud and true and worthy, both handiworks of God.

PART I

THE LAUNCH

Chapter One

CHID ALWYN stood with the rest of the shipyard hands on the bleak seaward slope of Baptist Hill when Old Man Tatum was buried that blizzarding day in January 1813. Off in the snow curtain he could barely make out the spars of the *Blessed Cause* moored in the salt river below, between a dolphin and the Tatum east wharf. The sight filled him with a queer excitement, thinking what the privateer was to mean to him and his dreams, but he kept his eyes reasonably attentive on Reverend Thurber's soaked prayerbook. The Reverend read slowly and dolorously, as if he enjoyed it, and in the pauses blew noisily on his fingers to warm them.

Chid could hear the frozen clods thumping on the chestnut coffin that he and Bob Crown had made in the joiner loft of the old man's shipyard. Chid and Bob were apprentices there, learning the trade; and when it came to making coffins, Moses Leet, the foreman, naturally set them at it. The gang, grinning and proud of the fine-lined packets and schooners which the Tatum yard had stood for until Tom Jefferson and his Congress of southerners had killed shipbuilding with their embargo in 1807, always called the coffins steamboats.

"You lads is in the wrong yard," Mr. Diggers, the spar loft boss had mocked them. "Whyn't you go daown to N'York? I hear tell Mister Fulton's buildin' another o' his fire and steam vessels. An', boys, you tell me what's more like a steamboat hull than a coffin."

"Your head!" Chid had tossed back, driving trunnels.

Chid had been an apprentice since he was fifteen, five years ago, and ~~he had~~ learned how to take it and give it. Now, knowing his trade as well as any and waiting only for his bound-agreement to run out come August, he could afford to sass a foreman—anyway, a loft foreman,

spar-making having never been the exact and cunning trade of a shipwright.

They had finished the coffin, lining it with oakum and a soft shiny bolt goods which Mary Leet had brought from her ma's, and made a few jokes about how handsome Old Man Tatum would look in his steamboat; then trundled it up the hill above the horse-ferry to the Tatum house that overlooked all New England, seemed as if. Now, his handiwork was gone, sunk into six feet of gravelly thawed earth, and the waste of it somehow made Chid a little mad. Two days and a fair deal of prime hand-whipped chestnut board and enough oakum to calk the garboard of a Noanker; just to keep the worms from the carcass of a grouchy old man a few extra months. There was nothing to show for his work. It was like his apprenticeship—almost five years of hard work and knocks, and now, with a war on and shipbuilding dead as a gutted cod, nothing to show for it either. Chid sometimes guessed that he had taken up the wrong trade, a matter he'd correct if his plans worked out.

The gale had started in the early morning, with rain, and had turned to sleet as the church bells tolled for Old Man Tatum. But now it whined around the burial party a full-blown blizzard in the quick winter twilight. Reverend Thurber droned on piously, blind to the shivering of the mourners and the sobbing of old Mrs. Tatum and her attending ladies.

Folks, Chid reckoned comfortably, must be all-fired cold. He himself was warm enough. He had contrived to kick together a small heap of the pine-knot embers which had been thawing the earth ever since the hour of the old man's death. The warmth of them sifted up through his homespun great-coat. It felt queer, being so warm inside and yet seeing the heavy snowflakes pile deeper and deeper on his shoulders.

Nez Nott conjured himself out of the storm, appearing like a swale wraith beside Chid. Nez was a spar-maker's apprentice, lately discharged by Mr. Diggers for rumming and such. He had that morning signed on the *Blessed Cause* schooner as carpenter rate, and since had been mightily interested in Chid.

"Noah Brown's arruv," Nez whispered. "He's at the Wagon's and Seamen's, and, Chid, what you s'pose? The man won't tech rum; not even on the house. Ain't that suthin', now? I'll take, sez he, a spot o'

Madeira, landlord; jest a spot fer the chills o' me. Chid, beware you do business with a man like that."

"I'm not a-feared," Chid said. "Reckon a man can do as he likes about rum and still have some business sense. Nez, you better spook. We oughtn't to be seen together till my papers are bought back and I'm free to ship."

"Why be so damned legal?" Nez growled. "Chid, a week with Cap Fish on the *Blessed Cause*, an' you can buy Noah Brown's own shipyard, the money you'll have."

"'Twould do me no good in the jailhouse," Chid said. "I've till August to serve, Old Man Tatum dead or alive. Nez, you lam. I got some profitin' to do right here before I can even commence thinkin' about shipping."

Nez spit into the wind and silently dissolved into the storm. Nez Nott was a raggie, on his own like Chid, since the thin vein of iron on Dejection Hill had run out years ago and scattered the loosely related Nott tribe. But he'd never made the mistake Chid had, signing apprenticeship papers to learn a trade, becoming practically a slave, which was what he considered Chid in the Tatum yard on the Mystick. Nez lived by his wits, never bothered by understanding how to read or write or cipher. He had the habits of an animal and could sleep wherever he happened to be when he became tired and eat anything handy, or nothing, when he became hungry.

Chid reckoned Nez was all right and in an untroubling way envied him his freedom. Chid wanted freedom too, but not the kind Nez had. When a man knew a trade, when he could read and write and own to folks, even though dead and gone, it wasn't simply the freedom of sleeping and eating that he craved. Chid had his own ideas about the particular brand of freedom which he wanted; not too well defined, but in his ambitions it sort of had its basis in money. And somewhere in the idea, also vague, was Mary Leet and a home—a white house, with a slate-stone sill and good outbuildings—and a shipyard. Chid once told Mary that, when matters turned for him, after the yoke of apprenticeship was gone, the first thing he'd do would be to start pegging for the shipyard—the Alwyn Shipyard, Chidsy Alwyn, proprietor, he'd pronounced in a hushed voice, saying the magic thing for the first time out loud.

Mary had laughed and mentioned money. "That," she said, "is where

you'd better start, Chidsy." And Chid had nodded to the common sense of it. He had always remembered her remark. There was, looking at it a certain way, a kind of a promise in it. Chid supposed the logical starting place from which to win a girl might well commence on a hard cash basis; and he reckoned that Mary, in the way girls might, had told him something like that.

Chid stood directly over the ebbing heat of the embers, misering it under his coat. He'd not had much trouble making money; no more than in keeping warm on this dismal bleak day when everybody else was cold. The trouble was that it had all been small money, pocket coins, not advancing his dreams much. There was still a tidy sum needed to get along with his plans. But Chid calculated that in a few hours things would be some different.

Reverend Thurber closed his prayerbook at last. He prayed then out of his head, softly, kind of reviewing Old Man Tatum's life, and the wind swirled from the north and screeched through the bare branches of the few twisted pasture oaks hard by the stone fence of the burying ground. Chid had to wait. What he was going to do, he sensed, couldn't be mixed with such a solemn moment. But he drew forth his prepared paper and nodded to Mr. Driddle, the gravedigger, in an understanding way; then stole silently down the hill and took up a post at the burying-ground gate.

In the rutted lane beyond, several livery carriages waited. The horses were blanket-covered, and they breathed steam in impatient blubbering blasts. From behind the frost scratches on the glass peered the drivers, gathered round a circulating bottle, wondering how mortals could exist on such a bitter, wind-swept hill, a-listening to a gol-darned preacher preach.

Chid was ready for folks when they at last came slowly down the hill. Mr. Driddle had instructed him, being experienced in graveyard conduct. Chid showed the paper, passing it through the family groups as they walked slowly to the carriages. He didn't have to say much for folks to understand.

"Yes'm," Chid said, making his words slowly, "for him we all loved. Thank you, ma'am. . . . Mr. Driddle'll call on you in time. Thank you very kindly."

He had no trouble at all with folks who hadn't worked for Old Man Tatum. Away from his shipyard, Asa Tatum had been well enough liked, a deacon in the church and one of the burgesses of the township. Almost everybody was willing to name a sum they'd be responsible for to place a handsome stone on the bare burying plot. Catching folks like that, cold and anxious to get indoors and having to decide right in front of neighbors, had been Chid's idea. Usually Mr. Driddle waited for two weeks and then made his rounds privately, and he never had raised but a small stone sum.

All Chid had to do was to mark down the sum and the name along the margin of the drawing for the proposed stone. It was astounding how it ran up. He faced the shipwrights unabashed, secure by reason of the wives being with most of them. William Dalrymple, the rigger, scowled and seemed about to talk as he might have in the loft, but his wife patted Chid's arm and said he was doing a right handsome thing, and mentioned two dollars. William let a booted foot fly at Chid's shin, hurting him, but Chid smiled and said his thanks to both in the best of humor.

"A great stone for a great man," Chid told a group filing by. "Even William Dalrymple promised a sum I'll not mention right out... and William, you might say, wasn't on first-rate terms with Mr. Tatum. Thank you, sir... I mark it five dollars for the Eldredge family; thank you indeed."

Chid did it just right. He had sense enough not to go to Mrs. Tatum or Reverend Thurber. Many told him that he was doing a fine thing, something truly for all of them. Chid could even feel a small glow of righteousness and forget for a minute the real reason behind his soliciting.

Mr. Driddle hung in the background shadows, looking anxious. The snow lay deep on his drawing, and the list of names filled all four margins. It made Chid feel a little bad when Mrs. Tatum touched his sleeve and said softly, "God bless you, Chidsy. Asa always believed that you didn't like him."

"I'm right sorry, ma'am," Chid said and lowered his eyes. "I always liked him and I'm proud to do this."

She passed slowly on to the carriage which Old Beemis was holding, the last to leave Old Man Tatum in his lonely new bed. Only Mr.

Driddle remained in the graveyard. He came now, like a wolf to a feast, from behind a stand of alder and clutched Chid's arm. "You done good, I reckon," he said. "Give over the paper, boy."

"'Bout two hundred dollars, off-hand figuring," Chid said. But he pocketed the paper, buttoning his coat over it. "Mr. Driddle, less than half that would provide an all-fired handsome stone. Look, I been up to New London and I kind of ran across Nehemiah Avery, and he mentioned he wasn't so busy this time of the year."

Mr. Driddle looked scared. "Boy," he croaked, "you wouldn't do that?"

Chid laughed and shrugged. "I ain't done nothing yet," he said. "I don't mean to, you don't make me. But Avery just happened to see your drawing sticking out of my pocket, and he mentioned, being as he wasn't busy, that he'd be pleased to make such a stone for an even seventy dollars, any reasonable lettering on it, and set to Mrs. Tatum's fancy soon's the frost leaves."

Chid wasn't worried about Mr. Driddle. He had had the digging and stone trade in Portersville ever since anybody could remember, and it wasn't reasonable to suppose he'd fuss too much the first time anybody had ever checked on his charges. Chid hadn't meant to do what he was doing. The original agreement was ten dollars for the list, Chid promising that, as one of Mr. Tatum's employees, he would raise an amount which would surprise Mr. Driddle. They had estimated that a hundred dollars would be good, and Chid would get his ten out of it. Allowing for that and some of the pledges becoming uncollectable for one reason and another, Mr. Driddle had designed a good sixty-dollar stone. But now, with the subscription list almost two hundred dollars, Chid reckoned he'd been smart to see Nehemiah Avery.

"I only checked on your price," Chid said, not mentioning his disappointment when he had found that Mr. Driddle's figures had been fair enough. "It was all right ... and you can still do the job for 'way under a hundred dollars, just like Avery."

"What happens to the extra money?"

"Well, now," Chid grinned, "I reckon that's for me to say. I collected it, and I got the list."

Mr. Driddle swore, not pleasantly, but Chid paid him no heed. A man had a right, sort of, to let off after being used like that. "Dang it!" Mr.

Driddle shouted, "I'll have you up before a magistrate. You'll end up in the gaol, I swear."

"We both will," Chid said. "Two hundred dollars for a sixty-dollar stone's akin to stealing, I'd guess. You been making stones a long time, Mr. Driddle... it would be a shame to have it end just because of one little mess like this."

Old Beemis's horses were straining into the hames, trying to break the wheels of the last carriage from the frozen ruts; a matter Chid watched with calculation. Just before they broke out, Chid figured to give a helping push. It was a cold bitter night, and his help might earn him a lift into the village, two miles away.

Mr. Driddle blew snow from his yellow Hessian mustache in resignation. "How much, boy?" he mumbled.

"Fifty," Chid said. "Fifty is all I need. It's cheap to you."

"All right," said Mr. Driddle. "Boy, you want to rejuce yer rates slight, we'd make a team, we would. Now, give over the list."

"Nope," said Chid. "I got to have the fifty right now. That's why it's only fifty. Was I to wait or maybe take your word for it, it would have to be double. I won't be around these parts much longer, so I'm willing to settle for that right now."

"Tarnation!" Mr. Driddle growled. "You think a man carries money like that in his breeks?"

"'Course I don't. You drop by the Wagon's and Seamen's in an hour. That's when I'll be needing the money. You'll get your list. But I wouldn't wait, was I you. It ain't so far to New London, and Avery is almighty idle."

Chid heard the carriage wheels crunching on new ice, and hurried to be on hand for the break-out. But Old Beemis, on the box, looked at him with impatience and moved over. "Thought that'd fetch you," he grunted. "This here rig ain't been stuck at all, Chidsy; it's been waitin' on you. What in snum you been chinnin' with Tom about?"

"We were picking out a nice plot for you," Chid said, clearing the snow from the offside of the double seat. "What you want, Beem?"

Old Beemis made a sucking sound understood by the horses, and they moved homeward through the blizzard. He swayed close to Chid, turn-

ing rheumy eyes on him, and handed him a flat package wrapped in a swatch of sailcloth.

"This here's fer you, Chidsy," he croaked. "It's why I waited. Nez Nott figured it wasn't right to give it to you in a graveyard, not with a preacher to windward, anyways." Old Beemis lowered his voice. "Nez says to mention that the *Blessed Cause* drops to salt a-fore midnight. He'll save yer berth till two bells, no later."

"It's the third bottle of rum he's given me," Chid said, taking the packet. "They must want me bad."

"Carpenters is hard to get," the old man said. "One flask will fetch up to able. But it takes two fer gunners and marines, and three, to least, for cooks an' carpenters."

"How's that?"

"It's like this now," Beemis said, cocking his head to reason the matter out in words for Chid, "seamen stay with the ship an' share all prizes. Gunners, they get picked off by topmen and musketeers, an' marines drink theirselves to death afore land's dropped. But carpenters, boy; they get sent home with the prizes to keep 'em afloat and get swindled outen their share o' what's taken arterwards."

"You forgot cooks."

"Hell," Beemis snorted, "I wasn't remindin' meself, lad, bein' one on a fare smacker when the damned gov'mint leaves shippin' alone. Chidsy, sea cooks rightly rate a full hogshead o' rum; their own shipmates plague 'em to death the hull danged voyage."

They crunched on in silence, paralleling the river, which was already icing in the coves. The first house lights of the village appeared like candles seen behind a smoky sash, and in the coach below Mrs. Tatum sobbed and made small meaningless talk with her ladies. Chid wasn't worried about shipping on the privateer, nor being swindled out of his share of the prize money. He had always had to take care of himself, and he hadn't done badly. The Embargo Act had stifled all shipping, and about every New England business depending upon it, and times had been poor. Squeezing opportunity, after the hard search for it, had in a way become a specialty of Chid's.

His main trouble right now was the hindering apprenticeship. Binding him to the Tatum yard had been one of the last earthly deeds of his

father's. He was himself a shipwright at the yard, and Chid had gone into the training joyously, thrilling to the feel of the smooth hickory-handled tools and the chuffing of the big wooden planes as they bit into sweet new pine plank. Chid guessed, then, that shipbuilding was sort of in his blood, as horse racing or seamanship or farming was said to be in some men's blood.

It had been all right while his father had lived. Flower, who was a West Indian black girl, had kept house in the place of the mother he had never known; and Reverend Thurber had told him, citing horrible examples to make his points, about rum and bad company and females—though he'd been skimpy with examples of the female kinds of trouble, giving no details—and his father had always been a friendly, understanding man.

Chid had felt the loss of his father keenly. A small brig had stuck on the Tatum launch-ways one summer tide, and his father had taken a gang under her to clear the jammed wedges. When the ship had at last commenced its belated slide to the river, men's screams had mingled with the shriek of her tortured blocking, and they had brought three men out from under the cradle. Two had died, Ned Darrow and Chid's father; and Chid was left alone.

Mrs. Palmer, who was next-neighbor, and the Leets had been kind to him, easing the pain and shock of those first dreary days. For a time Chid tried living with the Leets, enjoying the tidy, low-ceilinged home and the abundant table and the sport of teasing Mary, who was his own age. On winter nights the shipwrights gathered about Moses' hoarded nip-cider before the hearth, and the stories about ships being born were spun. Chid loved those evenings. From them he took the pride which he had in his trade, and came to understand in time that he was part of a great tradition of America. The Leets', save for his father's absence, was a better home than he had ever known. Even in those days he wanted, some day, to be master of one like it.

When he was eighteen, grown in pride, Chid had understood that he was almost a man and that he couldn't stay on at the Leets'. There was the question of board money, for one thing, for Old Man Tatum considered the learning he was providing sufficient compensation without a wage too. And for another thing, there was Mary.

She was suddenly, it one day struck Chid, a woman. Not one like Reverend Thurber had warned against, but a soft, lovely being who peopled his dreams more all the time. At first the discovery annoyed him, for, when she was loveliest, she sometimes acted as if she were ashamed of him, and she often turned on him almost savagely, and made him wash or watch his eating habits. But there came, in time, a way she had of looking at him and of avoiding him that scared Chid.

He didn't particularly want to do anything about that look, though it thrilled him in a queer upsetting way. He kissed her once, all washed and clean-smelling in Saturday night change, and he used to like to think that she hadn't forgotten the kiss. He hadn't; he reckoned he maybe never would. But when the chance came, he moved his small belongings to the apprentice dormitory, above the sail loft at Tatum's, and bunked with the journeymen who came to work in the yard.

Thereafter he moved in a man's world, thinking and doing man things. He learned, quickly enough, how to take care of himself and fight for his place in their bunkhouse society, and it felt good of an evening, with his back aching from a long day of adzing breast hooks or whipping plank, to linger in the Wagon's and Seamen's with pleasant company over flip and shipyard talk to ease the remembrance of it. It was good not having to explain to Aunt Leety where he had been. She had always wanted to know, like a mother, or as Mary did sometimes. Once in a while, when they'd ask him, Chid would come right out and admit he'd been at the tavern, taking a peculiar delight in thinking that Mary believed the worst of him. Mr. Halliday, who was landlord of the Wagon's and Seamen's, could provide any comfort a starved seaman or hunter or townsman, too, could want; a matter well known along the coast but not mentioned except by the menfolks. Tarrying there was wicked in the eyes of some. Chid didn't believe so. It was what a man did there, not merely being there, that counted.

For a while Chid used to go to the Leets' for his Sunday dinner, coming early so Aunt Leety could take a swing at patching his clothes and Mary could decide whether he needed to shave or not. He made it a point always to wash for Sunday and pull his clothes around as neatly as he could manage, but they always found something that needed the needle or fussing over. At first Chid used to tell himself that he was just

going to stoke up on some first-class fodder; that these extra hours with Moses, his foreman, helped him in learning his trade. But he knew, deep inside, what he really wanted was to see Mary, to catch her with that queer thrilling look in her eyes.

Moses Leet, after dinner, always took a nap, snoring loudly on the back parlor sofa, still in his stiff church clothes; and when he'd wake up Chid and he would plan out the next week's work at the yard. Chid enjoyed that. Thinking ahead, planning, bringing out some cute short cut to save time or material, always gave him a feeling of promise, as if, come time and opportunity, it would be a mighty useful and profitable talent to have. But always, when he thought of himself in Moses' boots, it was at some distant time when his bound-papers had run out and he was truly on his own.

Moses, smoking one of the Philadelphia seegars of the box of fifty which Mr. Tatum gave him each New Year's Day, sometimes branded Chid's ideas as cheating.

"There ain't no short cuts in shipbuilding, boy," he pointed out once; "not in life either, there ain't. It's a lesson you got to learn, Chid, 'pears to me."

"A job," Chid had argued back, "has got to show a profit. It's what Tatum or any man takes 'em for. So I reckon a man's got a right to twist his time and material and work methods 'round much as he's a mind to to make a profit—so long as he turns out the job."

"Well, yes an' no," Moses conceded. "Trouble is, Chid, you look at shipbuilding and life, too, as a lot o' little jobs, each to show a profit. It ain't like that. It's all one long timeless job, an' a smart man makes his profits from hundreds o' little jobs, all strung through the years, losing on some maybe, but averagin' up handsome enough, most likely. An' all the while he's buildin' up suthin' besides profit; suthin' poor times an' jackasses in Congress and English frigates and human damnfoolishness can't never take from him. Lay you, Chid, boy, you can't name what 'tis."

"I can," Chid said; "you mean reputation, I reckon."

Chid hadn't missed the quick look Moses had given him. "Aye," he clucked, strangely not inclined to talk further; "I mean reputation. You might look to yours, lad."

Chid was just turned twenty then; tall and blond as one of the Swedish

fishermen who lived down Pequot way. He was quick all over, eyes, fingers, and feet, and strong as a young bullock, which he had once proved by throwing Teelyman's bull calf in under twenty seconds at Mr. Halliday's annual free June-day party at the Lantern Hill resort. He resented Moses' advice and suspected that the old man sometimes deliberately swung shipyard talk around to make it apply to himself. It was, Chid recognized, a cute way to watch and guide him without seeming to. And Moses, Chid knew, felt a responsibility for bringing him up decently, just as Aunt Leety felt responsible for his clothes and his cleanliness. He supposed they considered him almost their own blood and kin. He could never know, though, that their kindness and concern was partly because they both understood the look in Mary's eyes.

After a while Chid didn't set every Sunday aside for a visit at the Leets'. He skipped it, and church, too; and usually when he did so, it was because his new crony, Nez Nott, had concocted some bit of adventure much more to Chid's liking. And Nez Nott, parents held, was not good company for their sons.

Nez wasn't bad, but you had to know him to find that out. Most folks judged him unkindly because Nez never took the pains to make a favorable impression. He was concerned only with the physical business of living, living with the most fun and the least work, matters which everybody really was after but wasn't open and aboveboard about. Nez would work until he had achieved his uncomplicated wants. Then he would quit abruptly, and folks branded him shiftless. He wasn't. He worked hard, even at the simple chore of providing food, for inshore fishing and upland hunting were no longer the easy tasks they had been for settlers. Nez was an expert at both, and he considered it silly to work for money to buy what he wanted when it was so much more fun getting it direct.

As he grew older and wanted things besides food, he had taken to periods of work at the Tatum yard; usually in the spar loft where his untiring strength could elevate rough logs to sound smooth spars as quickly as any journeymen who really knew the trade. But his taste ran only to cheap dunder rum, in which he contended there was just as much fun as in straight expensive Martinique or Jamaican, and so he wasn't on Asa Tatum's pay roll very often or for very long at a time.

Chid couldn't rightly define what it was about Nez that attracted him.

Chid admired him and his ability to lick any reasonable situation without losing stride. He was direct about things and never had any trouble about weighing his decisions. Nez was for or against, friend or enemy, whole hog or none.

Chid supposed he envied Nez his freedom more than anything else. But it used to strike him as almighty queer that Nez didn't use his freedom as he himself would. Chid's idea of freedom was not to loaf and keep clear of responsibilities; quite the opposite. Freedom was opportunity; a chance to put to work some of the notions which Moses Leet, in his honest, old-fashioned way, had branded as cheating. That he would soon have it, and without that hindering wait until August, Chid was now certain.

It depended a lot upon this Mr. Brown and how he'd take Chid's proposition. Chid hadn't met a mortal yet who could argue for keeps against hard cash. Noah Brown, who was a Stamford man and had the largest shipyard in New York, save perhaps the famous one of Henry Eckford, had had his agent buy in the Tatum yard before the old man was fair cold. Chid didn't know what he wanted it for. But he did know that Mr. Brown now owned his apprenticeship papers, and not a respectable privateer skipper on the coast would sign on a hand who was still bound out to another.

Old Beemis stopped the team at the foot of Tatum Hill. The great white clapboarded house with the widow's walk perched above the snow-covered roof frowned down, throwing an edgeless purple shadow on the drifted snow of the flanking hill fields. In the rising wind the cedars whined, like hurt animals, unable to flee to warmth and kindness. Beemis shook his sodden lap robe free of muddy hoof-thrown snow clods, and made as if to climb down to the road. But Chid, understanding those things, checked him.

"No you don't," Chid said. "You can make it. You don't need an extra dollar from Mrs. Tatum."

"Hell, she's got 'em," Beemis mumbled, but remained in the seat. "Drivin's powerful thirsty business, boy. How'm I to get quenched o' the thirst, payday bein' Satiddy next?"

It was the least Chid could do. The old lady's husband's death had

been right profitable to him. Besides, Chid, having never known a mother, had a peculiar reverence for all women of mother-looking age. And he could take care of what was bothering Beemis and his Noank thirst.

The driver followed Chid with his eyes, watching his fumbling hands and understanding. Chid brought out Nez's bottle of rum and handed it to the old man. Beemis grasped it with rude eagerness, letting it gurgle steadily at his lips until Chid took it away. Chid took a generous nip for himself, letting the liquor warm him, then handed it back. "You had a dollar's worth first draw," he said, "and it's prime Martinique, but you can have it all."

Beemis belched his appreciation, and without a word spanked the reins on the rumps of the horses. They plodded slowly up the hill, making slippery work of it; then, at the top, turned into the circular drive before the Tatum house. Chid helped Mrs. Tatum into the house, letting her lean heavily on his arm.

She seemed very small and fragile. She walked slowly, with a curious uncertainty foreign to any Tatum and, it struck Chid, bravely. He placed her in a chair before the grate fire. Cooking odors came into the rich quiet room, and Chid guessed that Mrs. Palmer and Aunt Leety and perhaps Mary were in there, come to be neighborly to the old lady in those first empty hours. He didn't want to see them, especially Mary. When he came back, yes. It would be different then, and he would be secure in the triumph of his plans far beyond merely talking or hoping them.

"Stay to sup, Chidsy," Mrs. Tatum said, as her ladies took her wraps and filled the foot warmer with coals. "Asa asked you many a time, but you never came."

"No, ma'am," said Chid, not remembering that Old Man Tatum had ever mentioned the matter. "I've got some business down-street. I'll be riding in with Beem."

"If it's Mr. Brown you have your business with," she said, watching Chid keenly, "it will do you no good, Chidsy. Moses Leet and I made him agree to finish you. Asa and Moses both say you'll go far, but you need journeyman's papers. So you'll be off to New York, more than like, making yourself into what you started out to be. Mr. Brown has plans for you, Chidsy."

"Yes'm," Chid said. He didn't care about others' plans for himself, and it made him suddenly hotly angry, having plans which concerned him made without consulting him. But he said nothing to Mrs. Tatum, acting polite and regretful that he couldn't stay.

"You're a good boy, Chidsy," Mrs. Tatum said. "We were afraid you might take notions to go off with Captain Fish."

Chid said good night then. It startled him somewhat, finding that folks had read his intentions so easily and accurately. Only Nez knew that he wanted to go; and Nez wasn't a talker. Perhaps Mrs. Tatum was remembering that time two years ago when Chid had tried to buy back his bound-papers. He'd offered all the money he had in the world, the sum of four dollars and a quarter in silver. Asa Tatum had laughed uproariously, not taking the offer seriously, not even when Chid had said some hot, bitter things and threatened to run out of his bondage anyway. It never occurred to Chid that this reputation which Moses Leet thought needed looking after might have helped the old lady to guess his plans.

Chid had grown smarter since that experience; a great deal smarter. And one of the signs of a smart man was being close-mouthed, doing and not saying. Chid's father had been a Cape Anne man, and his mother was from Quanibogue, two miles to the eastward, and there weren't two closer-mouthed sections in all the states. Being close-mouthed came naturally, after babbling adolescence, and he'd learned other things along with it. He reckoned they'd stand him in good stead when he met up with this Mr. Brown' and made his trade.

Beemis had finished the bottle. He was in a genial, rummy mood, calling his horses Tom Jefferson and Tom Driddle because they denoted the end of everything; and, he prattled, half-drunk, that it was the end of driving those damned horses for him. The job made a man too thirsty, he said, and anyway he was a prime sea cook, used to stewing horses, not driving them.

"Fish's Marine captain was askin' 'round," Beemis confided, breathing heavily at Chid. "He's got interestin' articles fer them as you might call reg'lar."

"What's so interesting about them?"

"Gard!" Beemis hiccoughed, "I dassn't say, Chidsy. Honest, was you

to turn into me own sainted mother on the spot, I wouldn't dast mention the details."

"Shut up," Chid said. "Your blood must be pure dunder. What makes you talk so?"

"I'm sober, Chidsy, too damn' sober; that's what. It makes a man's mind wander, bein' sober. He sees things an' hears 'em. Fortunate I recollect I got a tiny smitch o' dunder stowed on me. Now ain't that nice, Chidsy-mate? Ain't it so, boy?"

Chid paid him no heed. Beemis was a sot, beyond mortal help. Two bells, mentioned by Nez, was only three hours away. And dreams, Chid had learned, didn't come true without a good rugged mortal push. Providing nothing went wrong, he had time aplenty to push his dreams along famously before the *Blessed Cause* sailed.

Chapter Two

MR. HALLIDAY'S WAGON'S AND SEAMEN'S stood near the junction of the Post Road short cut and the boggy lane which led seaward over the marshes to the fishing wharves of Noank at the river-mouth. Anybody waiting for the ferry or a change of stage horses was bound to yield to Landlord Halliday's inviting house. During the day the signboard, surmounted by a huge rum cask on which, in brass shoe nails, was outlined the shape of an anchor, could be seen from fifty rods in either direction, or from the opposite eastern shore of the Mystick and the road which led, eventually, to Providence and the Bay Colony. Often some of the barmaids, by which name Mr. Halliday hired them, disposed themselves upon the broad veranda which overlooked the salt field between the house and the river, adding promise to a stay there.

At night Mr. Halliday was careful to keep a welcome light in every front window and smoke coming from at least two chimneys if the weather was at all raw. But tonight, in spite of the usual lights which were ordinarily used by homeward-bound fare smackers as the ranges for the Ram Island out-channel, Chid was not aware of them until, appearing like witch's fire in a woodland swale, the carriage was suddenly upon them and the post-yard door made a white blur in the storm. The snow fell thicker and faster, muffling all sound. Chid could see nothing of the surroundings; not even the great lofts and shed of the Tatum yard only a few rods to the southward.

Beemis pulled up the team with a good-natured drunken curse. "Jump, boy," he said. "Listen, you be heedin' Nez's message, be'nt you?"

"You better get on to the stables," Chid said. "Sleet's makin' to snow."

"Well, naow!" Beemis chuckled; "smarter'n a wart, you be, Chidsy, I snum. But it's answer enough. I'll tell Nez."

"Don't tell Nez anything," Chid said. "Just wanting ain't doing. I can't say till I've done some trading with a man in here."

"Well, that's a howdeedo indeed," Beemis croaked. "Three bottles the captain sent you by Nez, and you don't make answer." He straightened suddenly, regarding Chid with a cunning look. "Chid," he said, honeying his words, "that 'ere message o' Nez's was a almighty effort rememberin', 'twas."

"Here," said Chid, understanding and handing the old man Nez's second flask of rum, which he'd tucked in his pocket when it had come to him at noon. "I don't use it regular anyway."

Beemis took a long draught, holding his woolen muffler under his chin to keep the swirling snow from blowing down his neck. When he couldn't drink any longer without breathing, he brought the flask to his lap. "Chid," he said, "actual I on'y wanted a sip, but I took a fair helpin' so's it'ud be a lesson to you. You talk too belittlin' about rum, and you'll come to no good on Preserved Fish's command takin' that attitude. Privateerin' is bloody business, boy, an' rum helps keep yer insides stowed down nice when yer mate's limbs commence dwindle."

"Let 'em dwindle. The whole crew can die of the rum horrors for all I care," Chid said, dropping to the road. "It'll be that many fewer to share the prize money with. That's all I want to sail for. Beem, you go straight to the stables and stay there till you're sober. Don't you go out afoot in this, and don't light any candles; you'd have the place afire in no time the way you are."

"Ar-r-r," Beemis growled; "on'y two flasks an' a smitch, minus yer own swillin,' an' you name me drunk. What's younkers come to these days?"

Beemis didn't expect an answer. He slumped into his coat and drove off abruptly. Beemis was an old man, almost sixty-five, and had seen the coast change from a few plantations and squired villages to a teeming industrial and farming area, wherein men gadded about with the untiring purpose of the ant. He didn't like it; and long ago, as a boy, he had learned to depend upon simple things. His authority was General Stark, and he would quote him often, like a passage from the Holy Scriptures.

"'Rum, kettles, an' bullets,' sez he," Beemis would croak, never caring who was his audience, "'Vital military stores,' sez Stark; 'got to have 'em,' sez he to Genril Washington, an' I heard 'im say it. An' I ain't

fergit; not never, fer it's damn' good stores any place, I hold. I was drivin' one o' the supply carts up to Bennington, where we was to turn back Baum an' his pretty Hessians. Well, Genril Stark, he overtook me like, an' he stopped an' he sez, sincere as a owl, 'Boys, whip up yer nags. The hull damned army's waitin' on you boys.' 'Genril,' sez I, man to man, 'we got a powerful load, an' whoever laid out this goddamn' road humped her over every quagmire in the blasted state.' 'I reckon they did,' the Genril said, 'but, boys, if you get into trouble, jest lighten yer load. Pitch out the kettles, then the bullets, but no matter what, fetch up that rum. This is a war we're fightin'. An' off goes me Genril. It's a solemn lesson, ain't it now, gents?'"

Beemis had lived pretty much that way ever after; jettisoning everything in life but the rum. He'd allow that other things might be handy on occasion, but when a man had real problems to solve, rum would serve best of anything.

"Take that Chidsy Alwyn," Beemis mumbled to the team as it plodded toward the livery stable without the help of reins. "He's got problems, he has. Here's Nez Nott, bringin' prime rum, an' opporchunity opens a door to fair spoils fer the lad; money an' station an' such. Does the lad whoop? Nossir, he don't. He squarms 'round with his insides which hev been poisoned by that there Reverend an' Moses Leet an' wimmin folks, an' he lets them binderin' things annoy the hell outen him, tryin' to solve his problems cold sober. Naow, a body o' sense an' experience 'ud recollect Genril Stark's wisdom. 'Fetch up that rum,' sez he. 'To hell with the rest. Amen, Mister Beemis!' Chidsy, you tarnal fool, whyn't you get good an' drunk an' fergit 'bout them 'prentice papers an' yer gurl an' Moses Leet slobberin' on learnin' a trade 'gainst the time when this country gets some sense banded into it? That ain't never goin' to be, an' Beemis knows fer certain, havin' fit fer glory an' the two Georges till he's plagued sick on it. Make yer pile now, Chidsy, an' damn yer scruples or whatever's a-holdin' o' you. Oh, you went an' skedaddled on me, hey? You leave a old man out in a wicked gale, all alone, like he never give you no wisdom an' good advice. Damn you, Chidsy! 'Don't make no light,' sez you; like I was drunk! Blast you, Chidsy!"

Beemis lurched to the stable doors and opened them, hiccougging gently, at about the same moment that Chid, having spent some minutes

peering through the sash into Mr. Halliday's taproom on the lower floor to size up his man and the situation in general, the post-yard door. Noah Brown, though it was but six o'clock, had finished his supper and, with the board cleared save for a candle and a writing folio, occupied one end of a small round table near the great chunk fire.

He was a slight wiry man, suggestive of hard muscles beneath his severe broadcloth jacket; and he wore, though he wasn't much more than thirty, a rich brown full beard. His eyes, too, were brown; and kind and quick. Chid had a feeling as he stood inside the plank door shaking off the snow and stamping some heat into his feet, that those eyes without seeming to were measuring him, taking his gauge, as they might size up a hard pine log and see it already whip-sawed into understandable decking and planking and spars.

Mr. Halliday, who had been elbow-leaning on his mahogany-wood bar, nodded to Chid; then turned to Mr. Brown. "This here," he said, "is Chidsy Alwyn, sir. He's one on your list."

Noah Brown looked directly at Chid and made a small bow. "A pleasure, Mr. Alwyn," he said cordially. "Come and join me. We've some business, I believe."

Chid had never bowed before in his life. He considered it a Tory habit, or, at least, an effeminate habit of magistrates, preachers, and such. But he felt himself compelled to bow now, and he made a clumsy attempt, which spilled melted snow water from his hat brim onto the table as he ducked his head. Mr. Halliday guffawed, but Mr. Brown made no sign that he had noticed, and Chid felt a quick appreciation for it. Almost this meeting had turned out like the last one at which he had attempted to buy back his bound-papers. The failure of that to Chid had always been that Old Man Tatum had laughed at him; not even ceasing when he had laid his savings and his dreams so eagerly and confidently on the table.

Chid, that time, had wanted his freedom to join the coming fight. The cry of "free trade and seamen's rights" and "no search of Yankee ships" was thick and challenging in the air. Chid did not fully understand the meaning of the slogans, but they had all sounded grand, coupled with the fifes of the recruiters and the yarns of adventure which the genial tarry-haired frigate mates told around Mr. Halliday's fire.

Chid had listened to frigate men entranced. When a regular Navy recruiter came, passing the word that he'd stand the score for all who would join and listen, the Stars and Stripes flew over the tavern post yard. It flew to a monkey gaff on a lightning-shivered elm, and it was said that the gaff had come from the *Cerebus* frigate which Mr. Bushnell had blown right out of the English Fleet with a device called a submarine. Sometimes, the privateersmen would come and the stark rattlesnake flag flew beneath the ensign. The rum then was the best Martinique, served without measuring, and its fire roused men to prideful resentment of their wrongs at England's hands.

Chid had listened to them all, and had taken his small savings to Old Man Tatum. The old man had just laughed, giving no answer in words. It was Moses Leet who had tried to set Chid straight.

"One o' the matters we got to pervide against, Chidsy," he said after his nap one Sunday, making out to discuss the shipyard problems as always, "is to see that our young lads don't go off to war onthinkin'. This war ain't like 'twas in seventy-seven. We was fightin' then for our homes an' our families an' our lives; for a nation wantin' to be born. But this war ain't nuthin' but a bit o' licensed murder an' piracy. Any man with a ten-ton bottom's allowed a Letter o' Marque an' all the prizes he can rob the sea of. This, lad, is a war for the money-bags an' the southern politicians, an' they expect New England to fight for 'em. An' New England, Chid, is jest greedy enough to do it pervidin' it can share in the loot."

"Free trade and seamen's rights!" Chid had said, making it sound glorious. "It's time we showed England we're entitled to respect; that we're free men and a great nation—the greatest on earth someday. Was I thinkin' of goin', 'twould only be my duty."

Moses studied him for a moment, then spoke. "You are thinkin' o' goin', Chid," he said, blowing smoke at the flies. "It's why I spoke so. Mr. Tatum told me—but he didn't understand, seems 's if. But, Chid, you're only a youngster, scarce fit to decide yourself. A smart man would figure that when this was all over he might serve his country a heap better knowing a trade than stumpin' about the taverns forever after, prattlin' about the war as if he'd fit it single handed."

Chid had laughed, thinking of Old Beemis and scores like him, tradeless drunkards and loafers and, really, a hindrance to the country.

"Well," he said then, "all right. I was thinking of going. Major Bane'll give a forty-dollar bounty for a man to join his company for a border campaign, and the best fodder in the whole Army. But I kind of cottoned to the *Sturdy Yank* schooner. Nobody gets any pay, not even Master Wingate, but all hands share in prizes, and I hear even the cook's boy came back with nigh two hundred dollars last voyage out."

"I know all that," Moses said, "but I don't believe in it. I'm a Massachusetts man, Chidsy, an' I cal'ate we'd best remain outside any war this here Carolina an' Virginia gov'ment stirs up for us. I'm even for sesesh if need be, for bustin' up what I gave blood for thutty-five years ago. I'd be reasonable if somebody'd but come as can show me he ain't just minded to dig into the molasses bar'l whilst the diggin's so prime. Bounty money, prize money—even the Navy pays a lay! Hah, boy, don't be deceived by cries o' savin' our union—it ain't in danger from nobody but the danged hogs who makes up most o' it!"

"If Mr. Tatum would free me, I'd fight tonight," Chid said, not seeing the reasoning. "But he won't. Don't you kind of feel different when you see the flag, proud and waving?"

"Depends," Moses said solemnly, "depends entire on who waves it."

They had let it lie there; and Chid was still bound out, for Moses told him flatly that he wouldn't take up his case with Tatum. But in time Chid came to understand some of the cruel truths in Moses' words. He understood about the privateer recruiters after Ros Crown's brig came in for fitting out. He could see that many of the officers who held open house at Mr. Halliday's were merely rabble rousers, parroting heady phrases in the fumes of free rum to get a man signed on in spite of his better sense.

Many of the privateers had come into the river to fit out after sea roving. Chid had seen the shot holes, and the awful havoc of chain and bar shot; and once, planing dried blood off a bleached pine deck, he had found a withered human hand wedged bloodily into a solid oak bulwark stanchion. He had talked with seamen who had fought, listening to their laments of how prize money had never proved up to promise after the courts and the brokers and the owners had taken their shares.

Bob Crown's brother, Roswell, came in on his sinking brig with both legs shot off at the knee, the stumps dabbled with hot tar and the smell of decaying flesh beneath stronger than the tar itself. He had died as his brother Bob was leaving to fetch the mother. He had died smiling, his eyes shining with a holy light and riveted to the shot-torn ensign on the mizzen gaff and his ears ringing with the promise of Mr. Lidbody, of Noank, the owner, to take care of his mother.

The Crowns could have used the money, Bob's father having been taken by a British press gang six years ago. But they never got a cent of it. Mr. Lidbody claimed, making an affidavit to the prize court at New London, that Roswell Crown had been a stowaway and therefore not entitled to share. It had made Chid's blood boil, opening his eyes to much; and Nez Nott, who was Bob's friend too, in his direct way had picked a fight with Mr. Lidbody and thrashed him soundly, then disappeared for a while. After that Chid saw that Moses Leet was right—it wasn't a war for their lives and homes and way of living, but licensed pirating by which a few men were making great fortunes and many men were dying.

Chid's town, though he did not know it, had suffered along with a few other coastal places which depended entirely upon the sea and its shipping for existence and livelihood, very much more than inland towns, or the great cities whose wealth and efforts were divided. Portersville was and had been a dead village, its people in real need and with no hope of better times until war actually came. But in June of 1812, with war at last declared and Mr. Cheve's Navy Bill calling for armed ships passed, prosperity had returned. Chid's neighbors turned joyously to ship building again and to reaping the easy profits that suddenly came. It was opportunity and succor; not so much to build wealth or hoard as to wipe out the debts of almost five years of bitter depression. Folks weren't much interested in fighting; not in the militia or in the Army, and certainly not in the Navy, where a man had trouble collecting his promised pay and shared prize money with hundreds of his mates.

Portersville, and some said Salem and Marblehead and Norwich, fought in their own way, for men's own pockets. Their grievances against a Congress charmed by Mr. Jefferson and his pacific shilly-shallying foreign policy, and their refusal to protect private shipping by naval force, were

too close and too real to permit them, as communities, to swing into war in wholehearted, selfless patriotism and sacrifice.

The Tatum yard, in those first months, built twenty of the miserable little gunboats which every commodore of the Navy had roundly condemned as useless against the great frigates of England's first line. It didn't bother Old Man Tatum or the town that they were useless. Tatum had his contract and his orders; his profit was assured, and he damned to these confused Washington politicians who ordered what they didn't need or couldn't use. Toward the end of the year, Mr. Tatum called his foremen together, conscious of the distasteful reputation his town was beginning to get. It wasn't all his or their fault. Near-by villages, like the peculiar ingrown settlement of Noank, where it was said they still believed in witches and two out of three children were idiots, had produced seamen and skippers willing to pirate, and to make cruel raids of looting and worse upon the islands. The deeds of some of these men had been laid at the door of Portersville, and New London to the westward.

Mr. Tatum proposed to build a fighting ship, a gift from the town to the Navy. Salem had once so presented the frigate *Essex* to the government. It would clear the name of the town, and, if the ship was all Mr. Tatum expected, result in orders for more. Chid himself had worked on the vessel, a large fair-lined schooner said to be modeled after the old slave carriers. He was proud of it, and so was the town, until Congress sent a commission to inspect it.

Portersville never forgave the commission. Nothing was right about the vessel; it was not what they conceived a fighting ship to be. Some of the innovations which Mr. Tatum had installed were considered impractical in the extreme. Especial criticism was leveled at the revolving platform on the quarterdeck upon which a long gun had been mounted for quick independent aiming. Mr. Tatum named some nasty names, and he wrote letters to Washington about stupid politicians and blind Navy pups with hidebound ideas, and in the end fitted the vessel out as a privateer and sold her to Captain Preserved Fish, a strange little man of uncertain origin but with plenty of hard cash. Fish took the schooner out on one short cruise, came back satisfied, not saying where he'd been, and immediately set up table at Mr. Halliday's. He called the schooner *Blessed Cause*, some said with his tongue in his cheek.

Chid, impatient for August, had wanted to join from the first drink. But it was not for patriotic reasons now. He had ample proof that this was a war for self and not for the nation, and privateers made money. Chid had seen their crews throw coins to the niggers and raggies as if it were so much hen corn. He'd seen the belly-bank of an unkempt dirty seaman at Mr. Halliday's where the man drank the very best rum and kept the girls behaving their cutest while he worked the sea out of his throat and his mind.

"Two thousand dollars in gold, me lad," the man said. "Zodac Kimble's the handle, boy. It comes from bein' smart. They fied me into the Army, them goddamn' recruiters did—but I didn't stay, not the secunt time I was pizened by their mangy beef. 'Zo,' I sez to meself, sez I, 'get smart. Like them beef contractors do, a-sellin' horses an' Injuns an' plain varmints fer honest beef.' An' I did, lad. Me captin' reported me kilt in the next skirmish—God knows who 'twas!—fer a tithe o' what I'd take in prize money. I give it to him, too, the swuzzlin' hog."

He was off the *Blessed Cause*, which was in the river for sparring and fitting out. In a blaze of coin-throwing he left for New Hampshire, where, he told Chid, he'd be a farmer king of the whole town of Derry. The picture of Zodac with money and situation appealed to Chid and fitted into his dreams. He thought now more than ever of the shipyard he wanted and of the ships to be built to satisfy Congress' sudden awakening to the necessity of bottoms to fight and win this war.

It pleased him to know that he could see clearly how things were, not as the catchy phrases and slogans would have him. His ambitions were large and expensive, and on all hands was opportunity. A man had but to get after it—and before this war was over, one way or the other, and it was too late. Even August, seven months in the future, might be too late.

Nez, admiring Chid, was for privateering, but he wasn't wholeheartedly for the idea of money. "What in shadders d'you want it for?" he asked Chid. "It's but an excuse. A good man don't need no excuse to do things; he jest does 'em because he wants to. Goin' fightin' for money ain't ary a bit more fun than fightin' fer the flag an' such. Whyn't you jest call it sport an' go?"

"Everything reduces itself to money," Chid had answered; "even patri-

otism, seems 's if. It's a handy kind of a way to express everything in creation, I guess."

"Rubbish!" Nez snorted. "'Tain't nuthin' o' value in this mortal world, save mebbe sweat. Yer talkin' like a preacher, Chid, 'bout things you don't understand. Neither do I, but I know I don't an' that's the difference."

Chid had laughed. But he hadn't changed his ideas any. Not when Mr. Tatum, who had prospered by the sweat of himself and scores of other men, had left nearly ninety thousand dollars to the old lady on the hill. Not when Noah Brown, this cool-browed man at the table, had just bought, for cash, a whole shipyard, including the future sweat of these same men.

"Come set," said Mr. Brown. "I've a friend coming later that I want you Tatum men to meet. But first we'll do our business."

"I'm not ready to do any business yet," Chid said. "I got to see Mr. Driddle first."

"You'll not see Tom Driddle now," Mr. Halliday grinned. "Leastwise, not if you know what's good for you. Chid, he's right engaged, you might say."

Mr. Halliday ducked his head toward the kitchen. Chid understood, but it didn't stop him. He hung his coat on the stag horn, and, saying nothing, strode into the kitchen. Mr. Driddle sat beside the fireplace deep in the embrace of a deacon chair, and on his knee, deep in his own embrace, sat one of Mr. Halliday's girls. Chid didn't care about that. If Mr. Driddle wanted to play the fool every time he made a dollar, it was his own business as long as he didn't play it with Chid's money. "Mr. Driddle," Chid said, "you want to talk to me here or where?"

"Not here, boy," Mr. Driddle said hastily, and stood up.

They went into the back hall, standing under the wall sconce with the single fat candle. "Them gurls is like beagle dogs," he complained. "They can smell cash a thousand miles off. Twenty-five, you said, Chid?"

"A hundred, I said."

"I swear to Hannah you didn't!" Mr. Driddle croaked. "Come to recollect, it might have been fifty."

"Hand it over," Chid said, and counted the money.

It was in paper. Mr. Driddle explained that he'd keep his coin so he

could jingle it and tease the girls. "Do," said Chid; "though hounds'll go right down in a hole after what they want."

Mr. Driddle grinned sheepishly, and, clapping the coins together like a man ringing in his cows, went off to the kitchen.

Chid folded the money and stowed it, not wanting it to show as a prosperous wad and start any false ideas with Mr. Brown. It was remarkable, the buoyant confidence actual possession of the money gave him. He'd never before had so much money at one time, and so had never dared dream to the extent that he dreamed now. To him, his immediate troubles were vanished; in his hand he held the assurance that at last he'd be out of bondage and have the freedom which the recruiters prattled so about. It was odd, thinking of how men who had freedom had gone off to war with the cry of freedom on their lips. They were fools, risking their lives for something they already had.

Chid felt a different man when he again stood before Mr. Brown. He had no inclination to bow. He walked right to the table, calling to Mr. Halliday for a cold joint in half a loaf and a mug of flip. "Yes, sir," Chid said; "we had some business."

"A small matter," said Mr. Brown opening his writing folio. "Mr. Alwyn—or Chidsy, if I may, please—I've bought in Mr. Tatum's yard, lock, stock, and barrel, and that includes your apprenticeship papers. You've until August next to serve them out; right?"

"That's right," Chid said, and waited.

He liked the man. There was an appealing directness and openness about him that Chid appreciated. Checking his information that way showed him a careful man. There was no real reason to think of him, as Chid had, as an enemy. Chid laid his money on the table.

Mr. Brown pursed his lips and looked at it, but he didn't touch it. He sat back in his chair, studying Chid, his brown eyes darting over Chid's face. "You want to buy out?" he asked finally.

"A-yep," said Chid.

Ruby, the kitchen girl, brought Chid's food and flip, the spice of the drink mixing with the steam from the hot finger water always supplied with a cold joint. Chid tore off a piece of the beef, washing it down with the flip. Mr. Brown hadn't moved. He still watched Chid.

"Mosès Leet mentioned that this might happen, Chidsy," he said. "I

paid little heed; apprentices usually don't have the price. Have you thought any why I should buy a small shipyard, remote from my own city, Chidsy?"

"Yes, sir," Chid said; "to get hold of Tatum's white oak stand. There ain't but small stands left any place in New England, and I guess New York way there ain't none at all."

"Well, that's good news," Mr. Brown said softly, seemingly pleased. "I hadn't known that I bought a timber stand, to tell the truth, but it will be welcome indeed. Well, Chidsy, I bought the yard to get hold of some shipbuilding talent, yourself and the other apprentices most assuredly included."

Chid didn't stop chewing. He pushed the money nearer. "It's eighty dollars," Chid said, not bothering to hide the triumph in his voice.

"Eighty's a handsome sum," Mr. Brown said. "Ordinarily 'twould be fair. But in this case that many thousand wouldn't do it. A boss bigger than you or me needs men. The name is Uncle Jonathan. Know him, Chidsy?"

"A-yep. Plenty," said Chid. "So you're just a recruiter. Mostly they pay the score and wave a flag."

Mr. Brown chuckled, not angry. "In a way I am," he said pleasantly. "The only difference is that I don't feel obliged to buy the drinks. You see, Chidsy, in your case, all I have to do is to tell you what to do."

Chid let it sink in. That his cash was without power was hard for him to understand. But he couldn't misdoubt the finality of Noah Brown's refusal of it. He reached for the folded bills, hesitating before pocketing them. "No," said Mr. Brown, "put your money away. You're worth twenty times that to the nation. Fifty of you are worth all the gold in New England."

"There's a heap of it," Chid said eating again, not wanting to show how he was feeling.

"A mighty heap, counting what was British and French."

"I was figuring to get me some of the British kind."

"Moses Leet guessed so," Mr. Brown nodded. "So did Mrs. Tatum. Don't let the rattlesnake flag fool you, boy. That's not the flag for patriots."

"It didn't," Chid said. "I wanted the prize money."

Ruby came again, taking the cleaned pewter plate. "A real man drinks flip double at least, Chid," she said with easy familiarity.

"I ought to," Chid said. "A few in me, and I'd do what I set out to do. There's just a writing between me and it."

"You wouldn't want law trouble," said Mr. Brown smiling.

"No. I wouldn't want any kind of trouble."

"After this is over," Noah Brown said, trying to understand Chid, "we'll have times such as the Union never saw before. There'll be plenty of opportunity for a man to make money; lots and lots of money. Now the job is to win this war, get it over with and out of the way and be ready to trade on the great name we'll have among nations. Are you a Massachusetts man, Chidsy?"

"Nope. Mystick River. But we're just as sore as the baymen. We've been starving for seven years. It took the rest of the country till now to feel the bad times they created enough to fight. We were ready ten years ago. Now your war's nothing to us unless it pays us."

"It's not my war," Mr. Brown said; "it's ours, yours and mine and everybody else's. A fair man will grant that Mr. Jefferson hurt your New England with his embargo. He was ill-advised, let's say; but even at that he hadn't much choice. It was better to hurt a few states and keep out of war than to hurt the nation when there was a chance to straighten out matters with England. New England is used to her hurt, used to living on in spite of it. What she needs, perhaps, is another hurt to really rouse her. And it seems as if she might be getting it; any day. You understand what I'm saying, Chidsy?"

"A-yep," Chidsy nodded. "But I don't care."

"I think you will; all of us will, in time," Mr. Brown said quietly. "I'm here to do my small part in preventing that other hurt. It's why I need you and the other apprentices and every able-bodied shipwright that I can talk or argue into it."

"You got Bob Crown?"

"Earlier this evening; yes. And Sylvester Tatro and the Coons boy and the others. You're the only one that's balked, and I don't know why I'm talking so to you instead of giving you your orders. I expect it's because I can see in you something I had myself not so long ago. But I got over it, Chidsy, and you will, too."

"I'm curious," Chid said. "Mrs. Tatum mentioned New York."

"That's where we start from," Mr. Brown said; "from there we go to the Great Lakes, beyond Niagara. The nation needs a Navy up there to stop that hurt which threatens New England."

"Shucks!" Chid shrugged, not impressed. "The British been up there for ages, threatening. Nobody's scared of that bunch of cadets in Canada."

"I'm afraid you're right; nobody is scared. But they're wrong, dead wrong. So far these cadets, as you call them, have been busy in the Michigan lands, and they took them, too—with the torch and the scalping knife and rum-crazy Indians. Would you want that to happen here?"

"It couldn't," Chid said with conviction. "Anyway, what'm I to do to stop 'em?"

"Help build the fleet I mentioned—in the best time any fleet was ever built, and with the greenest, worst stock and against the blindest, most incompetent naval affairs committee any country was ever burdened with. But we'll do it, Chidsy—you and the Bob Crowns and the veterans of seventy-seven."

"Sounds like a big order, and not much profit," Chid said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Just stand by until the party has been formed. I expect a naval officer here from Newport any moment, name of Perry. He'll do the recruiting of those we can't order up with us. I hope to get along by noon tomorrow the latest."

"How about our tools?"

"Gone this afternoon, by packet to New York. I'm glad to see you're agreeable, Chidsy. You'll be proud of your part in all this some day, and you'll have your trade and full journeyman's papers from the Noah Brown yard. A man couldn't be better fitted for the future."

"Well," said Chid, "he might be fitted out with hard cash, seems 's if."

Chid rose. The taproom was filling rapidly, and the tobacco smoke of forty clay and iron pipes was beginning to thicken the warm air. Ruby and Jerushy scurried among the tables with trays of flip and mulled ale, and Mr. Halliday, keeping score as fast as he could write on the slate, beamed happily on the room.

Chid knew most of the men. They were almost all Tatum men, now suddenly unemployed again, and curious as to the meaning of the sum-

mons to Mr. Halliday's house. It was after seven, but the Providence coach had not yet arrived. Chid guessed it had been delayed by the storm and that this man Perry would be on it. Outside of disposing of the apprentices, things seemed to be waiting upon his arrival. Mr. Brown ordered a glass of Madeira, for himself only, and talked quietly with those who asked him questions.

Chid reckoned he'd been smart, not saying yes or no. Mr. Brown had stated his orders in a nice way, giving him the reasons, Chid was bound to admit; but he had been positive enough. Chid recognized that it wasn't a matter of choice; he had to go, just as if Mr. Tatum himself had given the orders. But Chid appreciated the fairness and humanness of the man. He liked Noah Brown about as much as any man he could think of. He wasn't ashamed of the bow he had made to him. Thinking about that, it was an instinctive thing, the appeal of the man compelling it.

He could laugh with disdain at Mr. Diggins. Mr. Diggins, wanting to ask a question of Noah Brown, approached with rabbitlike scraping and pulled his forelock and said "yer honor" as if he were a foremast hand instead of a boss spar-maker. Chid was certain his own bow had been in respect, not in fear.

He was glad he'd had sense enough not to pass his word. Then it would have been binding. So far he'd just listened and it left him still free. The bound-agreement didn't bother him; that had been made for him by others, and he wasn't concerned with the right or wrong of breaking that. It was simply a question of which would pay best, to ship with Captain Fish and risk law trouble with Mr. Brown as promised, or wait until August when he would be free of the long agreement.

It struck Chid as odd to see Moses Leet in the crowd. Moses, as far as he knew, had never before set foot in Mr. Halliday's place. Chid said "howdo" to him as always. But it was odd, seeing him there. The day that Old Man Tatum had died, Moses, after supper that evening, had told his family that he was quitting for good. Chid had been there. "Forty-seven years, stiddy save wars, I been buildin' o' ships. I ain't got the venture in me to start anew for another boss now. My bones git almighty tired lately. I put it by when I made it," he told them, hiding his pride, "an' naow I'm jest goin' to rest; me and mother. I reckon

anyway Mary mayn't be about ferever—and mother'd jest hev to hev me on hand to keep her out o' mischief."

Chid remembered that he'd blushed; but not as much as Mary had. He'd been glad for Moses. Nobody, he reckoned, had ever labored more loyally or better deserved his rest and peace.

The bar talk was of this northern place which Mr. Brown, when questioned, had mentioned. He gave no great amount of information, saying he'd rather have Captain Perry give the details. It was a waiting time, during which men took extra drinks, and wondered what was in store for them now. Times had been good these last months. Old Man Tatum's death and the sale of the yard had been a shock.

"Where in creation's Presque Isle?" one of the gravers wanted to know.

"You mean Sackett's Harbor," Mr. Diggins said. "It's on some lake to north'ard, where Henry Eckford's got his gang to framin' up some more o' those damned Jefferson gunboats."

"I mean Presque Isle, the place mentioned by him." The graver ducked his head toward Mr. Brown, still at his table. "Sounds damn Frenchy to me. You don't get me goin' to no foreign country. Dang it, we got our own troubles right here in the States."

"Presque Isle," said the schoolteacher, who lived at Mr. Halliday's steady, "is on Lake Erie, way up to'other end of Pennsylvania, but you go through York State to fetch it from here. And it's not French. It's not even American—just an old fort that nobody wants save maybe the greedy British. A man would be a fool to go there. Even the French couldn't abide it."

"It must've been pretty goddamn' bad, then."

"Turrible. Lake fever and varmints and begging Indians thicker'n owls in a grain barn, though I 'spect they're some tamed by now. Couldn't say, a man hears so many damnfool tales about Indians. Any of you gents goin'?"

The ready chorus of nos made Chid grin. It was his own decision, too. He'd hung fire for a while wondering if Mr. Brown would elaborate on his proposition, but he remained cordial but uncommunicative. Seems 's if, Chid thought, if a man took a contract to build ships in a place that even a Frenchman had abandoned, he'd be smart to estimate on some

extra pay. It wasn't reasonable to expect a man to leave his home and family and the neighborhood of at least some opportunity unless he could make extra handsome wages out of it. Mr. Brown hadn't mentioned wages.

The captain of marines from the *Blessed Cause* came in, flanked by two snow-covered hands each armed with a cutlass and a boarding pike.

"All hands for the *Blessed Cause*, Cap'n Fish," he bawled, looking truculently about the room, "report on board at once. The Cap'n sails tonight." His eyes caught Chid. "You Chidsy Alwyn?" he asked.

"A-yep."

"Well, drag your feet then. You're signed."

"I'm not," Chid said, not bothering to move from his draped position over the bar.

"Mr. Nott says you did."

"Nez Nott lies," Chid said. "He only wishes I had."

"I'll tell him," the captain snarled. "He won't fancy bein' named a liar. Goda'mighty help you if you are lyin'. I'll tend to you personal."

"Come on," Chid said; "tend to me."

They glared at each other for a long moment, but it was the marine's glance which wavered. Chid laughed lightly. The captain stamped off into the night looking as if he was genuinely sorry that he'd failed to find some hands to be marched off to the ship at cutlass point. Chid couldn't say why he still hesitated. He had only to leave silently. No one would miss him; not until it was too late, anyway.

Moses Leet was watching him, a queer proud smile playing at his mouth. Chid's father used to look at him that way after he'd boasted and talked big as a youngster, then done as he was bid and as was right anyway.

"You done right," Moses said quietly, drawing on his pipe. "It'll make mother kind o' proud, boy. We was scared some'at; you seemed so tarnal cold an' hard an' cal'atin' at times."

Chid said, "I ain't decided yet. I got till two bells; nine o'clock."

"There you go again," Moses said, laughing. "Chidsy, lad, inside you're all right. I guess we know you better'n you know yourself."

Chid didn't answer. The old man's pride and concern gave him a small warm feeling. He'd miss him and Aunt Leety no matter where he went.

And Mary. Though he didn't think about her. She was different. Mary lived, near him always, in his dreams.

The door opened, and Nez Nott came in. He was a sparse, bony lad, though not tall, with a hooked Yankee nose, like a New Hampshireman from which state Nez had heard the Notts had originally come. He was a year older than Chid, and troubled by no indecisions. He'd promised Captain Fish long ago, and signed the articles that morning. Nez said he'd never been to sea, save coddling and such, and it was an experience a man owed himself, especially as there was considerable sport connected with it.

He'd been after Chid all day to join too. He came right to Chid now, and had sense enough to keep his voice low. 'Great airth an' seas," he said, "Chid, what in blazes d'you want o' the capting, anyway? You got twice the rum o' most. Whyn't you show up on board, like you been preachin' since Gosh knows when? I d'clare, you make me into a prime liar, Chid."

"You are. What'd you tell 'em I signed on for?"

"Well," Nez said, rubbing his neck, "I was that sure you would. I was bein' ragged about knowin' a chicken-heart, an' I jest had to say suthin'."

"Well, I'm coming. But, look out; Noah Brown wouldn't sell back my papers, and I got to sneak it. Nez, there better be some mighty important prize money. I'm letting myself in for a pack of trouble."

"Thought you said money'd buy anythin'. Won't it buy a little peace from trouble?"

"A-yep," Chid laughed. "I reckon enough of it will. You get along, Nez. I'll be along immediate."

Nez left, and before the door had slammed, his face appeared beyond the candle in the window, watching Chid. At the same moment a jingle of harness bells sounded in the post yard and the mail pouch thumped mushily against the kitchen door. Mr. Halliday shouted for the hostler, and thrust half a dozen pokers into the fire to be ready for touching up the cider.

Mr. Brown folded his writing folio and, draining the last of his wine, stood waiting at the door.

"I expect that's Captain Perry—Oliver Hazard Perry," he said, with relief it seemed to Chid. "I'd take it as a personal favor. gentlemen. if

you'd listen him out. I can only show you how to build ships. Mr. Perry can show you your duty."

"Hell," said Chid and spit, "another recruiter."

"What?" inquired Mr. Halliday.

"Recruiter!" Chid growled. "Now Congress wants shipbuilders. There's no end to it."

"Oh!" Mr. Halliday grinned and rubbed his hands. "Ruby, have the black boy broach another cask o' rum an' warm your mugs ready. Chid, I hope this war continues forever. It keeps the gov'mint in commotion—an' commotion makes a thirst like nuthin' else I ever see," and he winked broadly at Chid and jingled the coins in his poke.

Chapter Three

THE LANDLORD HAD a table cleared and ready for Captain Perry. His smile of welcome was his best, and Mr. Halliday, remembering the frigate men who had run up a regular New Year's Day score and paid for it in gold, couldn't help the prosperous twist that his smile took.

"This way, sir," Mr. Halliday beamed. "This 'ere table, sir; me greatest. Tom, you lazy plague o' landlords, bresh the snow off'n the gentleman. Your cape, sir—thankee kindly. You'll find the Wagon's and Seamen's has all the comforts, an' ye've but to raise your wind'ard eye to have me complete attenshun, sir." His voice grew cunning and confidential, "An' lookit, sir, I never did hold wi' the gov'ment starvin' o' you navy men; never. Say the word an' I'll let 'er rain into the rum. More'n genrilly, y'understand, hah! An' you'll get two scores, a big un an' a right un, and you pay the one you're a mind to. What's fairer?—all receipted neat an' in order fer your fleet clerk. Tom, draw what the gentleman wishes; on the house, Tom."

But Mr. Halliday might have saved his welcome and broaching a fresh rum cask too. Oliver Hazard Perry was no ordinary recruiter. Relieved of his wool sea cape and his boots swept of the clinging snow by Tom, Perry brushed past Mr. Halliday, paying him no heed, and greeted Mr. Brown with quiet cordiality. He sat down immediately, taking the rum from Tom and downing it in one draught, marking him a deep-water man, a thing that did not go unnoticed. Mr. Halliday stood at his elbow in confusion; then stood guard over the large table which he had prepared as if he still had hopes of its use.

Perry was no run-of-the-deck naval officer. His figure and his face were slight, and his features small and delicate, almost girlish. He wore his hair, which was a rich soft brown, brushed in a wavy fold across his

forehead, and long curling side-whiskers lay softly on each cheek. He had on the full-dress uniform, in the manner of the French, with a stock and black silk cravat, the collar being ornamented with three gold stripes, the lower one of which swirled into a shoulder peak and then followed the jacket edge to the break of the swallow-tail. On each shoulder was a heavy gold bullion epaulette, draped with easy lines which made them look like small golden wings.

The first impression to the men in Mr. Halliday's taproom was that this quiet, refined officer, obviously a gentleman come to rank via mid-shipmanship and not through the hawse-hole and pitch barrel, was somewhat of a dandy and a fop. The impression was borne out by his voice. It was delicate and well modulated and extremely low, but audible and authoritative even though the full womanish lips scarcely moved when he spoke. No one could ever imagine that voice raised in shouting, or in harsh anger.

Perry was in his middle twenties, but his weather-seasoned face and hands bespoke the man of long active sea service. There was, to prove it, a distinct roll in his gait; as if, as he'd entered, he had expected Mr. Halliday's scrubbed chestnut floor to heave to the lift of a sea at any step. After he had downed his rum, he sat slouched in his splint arm-chair, crossed feet extended fore-and-aft and his eyes roving aloft as if to gauge the set of a tall ship's canvas, as a skipper might on his quarter-deck in pleasant trade-wind weather. Noah Brown talked, quietly and earnestly, bringing a ready, understanding nod from Perry from time to time.

"Bless the child," growled Mr. Diggers, whispering to his neighbors at the board where the mulled drinks were served, "I ain't a mite surprised the Navy ships a double set o' spars on its vessels. How's a childer like him to know when to reef an' douse an' when to set his stuns'ls?"

"Batten it," Moses Leet said mildly, drinking nothing. "This man's a fightin' man, I hear say. He l'arned the Barbary heathens a lesson, and he served on the *Constitution*; what would you have? A wizened old captin' like the British have for everything over a sloop rate? I'll lay this man'll sail a ship as well as fight her."

"Gunboats!" sneered Mr. Diggers. "Mis'able Jefferson gunboats! I hear'n on his command, too—up to Newport. Thutty o' the things, all layin'

nice to permanent mud hooks an' never makin' gunfire the hull war through."

"Shet up," Chid said. "If he'd just but look at you, you'd scrape to your belly. We got a fair proposition from Mr. Brown. Listen the man out."

Chid's reaction to Perry was entirely positive. Instinctively, as he had liked Mr. Brown, he liked this man. He'd certainly rather, if he had to, follow a man like Perry, young and possessed and so capable appearing, than some of the coarse profane bosuns and petty officers who had come to recruit in the past. Or some of the old gouty commodores like Rodgers or Preble, whom he had seen in the inspection parties which for a time had made life miserable in the yard when Old Man Tatum had tried building for the Navy. Rodgers once, in a dozen blistering words, had condemned not only the work of the yard but the entire State of Connecticut and all its shipwrights, then stalked off on his cane to his barge without a smile to show that he was human.

This man Perry, not so very much older than Chid himself, was obviously human. Chid admired his carriage and his manner and his self-assurance. These qualities, in a faint un-understood way, checked with something deep within him, with an ambition or a dream peopled by a similar possessed, intelligent being who, in the dream, was Chidsy Alwyn.

When Noah Brown introduced Perry to the company, there was a general movement of the men toward the table. Mr. Halliday beamed, but the usual invitation did not come. Chid thought he would have to strain to hear the words, so low were they, but, oddly, the taproom was as quiet as a church.

"I am pleased to address you as fellow Americans," Perry said, standing and as at ease as if he were talking to a single well-known friend. "I haven't much to say. I'm not going to have our landlord serve you spirits and then, drunk and muddled, carry you off to serve articles that you would not recall signing.

"Our country, gentlemen, needs shipwrights as sorely as it needs soldiers and seamen. But it needs them sober and loyal and bound to service only by their love of these United States and the worthwhileness of what they are doing. I can't hold out much to you, not much at all. No prize

money, exceedingly few comforts, a determined, stubborn, and well-organized enemy, and time as scarce as trade in New England."

"If yer tellin' us the bad first," Mr. Diggers chirped in a heckling voice, "the good must be even worse."

Perry turned to him with a courtesy undeserved, quite unruffled. "Sir," he said distinctly, "the good is so obvious that it does not require stating. I think every man of us knows what it is."

"Tarnation!" Mr. Diggers mumbled, "I don't."

"The chance to serve your nation, you swuddlin' fool," Moses Leet rasped. "This officer ain't no privateer mate, a-prattlin' about rum an wimmin an' loot."

"Aye," Perry said softly, "the chance to serve your nation. Gentlemen, that has been the motto of my life, and its meaning and its purpose. And yet I am, like yourselves, just a plain common citizen, happening to know how to serve my country with powder and ball rather than with adze and oakum iron. The leather apron and the woolen shirt is as honorable as this uniform and far more important."

Chid approved. He could see the cleverness of the man—not talking from a superior height or from behind the awesomeness of gold braid. He would make his point with ease, having sized up the situation and attacked it with understanding. Yet Chid could feel that Perry believed what he said; that his appeal to the patriotism in them was sincere and not merely a part of the shoddy show he had seen so often in this very room.

Perry told them, talking in conversational tones, about Mr. Eckford's shipbuilders who had gone to Sackett's Harbor. It was all that he could tell them about. Presque Isle, the site of the new naval construction yard, was unknown to him. Eckford had taken with him every able-bodied shipwright that could be spared from the big New York and southern yards. The tedious long journey had been made on foot northward from where one of Mr. Fulton's steamboats had landed them near Troy. Boston, hotbed of the sesesh talk of the Bay State, hadn't sent many of her shipbuilders. The Delaware and Maryland and Jersey towns were busy on naval building. There were few places left from which to recruit experienced shipbuilders save the remote coastal towns of Con-

necticut and Rhode Island. To enlist these men was his purpose; it was why he and Noah Brown both were here.

Chid was fascinated by the story of Sackett's Harbor. A worthy fleet had been built there, matching the tonnage and the hitting power of the British fleet of Ontario and keeping the lake open and the enemy at bay. Far to the westward the enemy had taken the Michigan lands, penetrating deeply to the southward and policing it with drunken and murderous Indians. They needed now but to open a secure line of communications through Lake Erie for an army of occupation to pour in from the sea, northward above Ontario, through Erie and into the Michigan lands. America then would be surrounded as the storm surf surrounded Block Island. Erie had to be closed to the British. It was America's last chance.

There was no fleet to close it. America's only heavy ship on Erie had been captured by the British, and the few small remaining gunboats were bottled up in the River Niagara behind the formidable guns of Britain's Fort Erie.

Commodore Chauncey, at Sackett's Harbor, could do no more than hold Ontario, matching adze stroke for adze stroke as he tried frantically to outbuild the British. He had early comprehended the Erie situation, and one day, just before the bitter winter storms closed the Indian trails of northern York State, which were the only paths westward save the enemy-controlled lake itself, he had sent twenty of his precious shipwrights to the new yard. Their orders were to fell trees for the ships to be somehow built.

"The pity of it was that he could send only a score," Perry told them. "Eight died—'Indians,' the others said when they finally staggered into Pittsburgh a fortnight ago; 'Indians with English muskets, and the single purpose' of burning the timber which was seasoning at Presque Isle.' Mr. Brown has seen these men. They're mad as a fresh brew, and are going back with him. I wish you could see those men. I think you'd get mad, too; just hearing their story and seeing the cruelty that was practiced on them by the Indians. Mr. Brown would like to go with many more than those twelve, but I vow he'd go alone if he had to. How many Connecticut men are going, Mr. Brown?"

"Five apprentices." Noah Brown said quietly, "so far."

"They'll come back heroes. Is that all?"

In spite of himself Chid felt the magnetism of Perry dissolving his natural caution. He recognized the talk as recruiting talk, cleverly ve-neered, and instinct told him to be on guard. Yet that elusive something which Perry put into it as a man drew Chid, and he found himself wanting to believe.

"You goin' yourself?" Mr. Diggers inquired truculently.

"I am, sir," Perry replied, "as soon as I complete details at this end. Though I guess I'm something like the fisherman down Kingston way, over in Rhode Island State where I was born. He wanted my father to buy some fish. 'Bring 'em along,' said my father. 'Well,' said the man, 'as a matter of fact I haven't caught them yet.' I am to command the Erie fleet when I catch the ships."

The men laughed, appreciating the anecdote. It was their own language and understandable, and made Perry's presence among them a reasonable thing. It surprised Chid somewhat to see the interest. Mr. Brown answered questions soberly and with forethought, not painting a rosy picture of shipbuilding in the remote wilderness he understood Presque Isle to be. Wages, he said, were high, nine dollars a week, with free barracks and food. Iron workers might ask ten dollars, and gun-smiths could ask what they wished. Transportation, too, Mr. Brown said, was free, but, as he reasonably pointed out, walking was free anywhere.

Oddly, these matters of money did not bother Chid now. It was as if he had again heard the fife music of the army recruiters of last summer. Money hadn't mattered then either; his quickening pulse and proudness had been for something bigger than money. He felt it again now.

Moses Leet stood with tears in his eyes, suddenly shaking Mr. Brown's hand. "I don't know why I done it," he was saying. "Three days ago I put my tools away for good, sir. Last war I fit with steel blade an' musket ball. I reckon it never occurred to me a man could fight with his tools an' his bare hands. I reckon, sir, though, mebbe it's mostly a sort o' faith in a leader like him."

"Moses!" Chid said, scared, "what're you saying?"

"Why, I'm goin', boy," Moses said simply. "Nobody ever gave us the sense o' it before. All they offered was liquor an' license. I swear, Chidsy,

'twas like the sweet sound o' a church bell to know that I was needed again an' could serve."

"What'll Aunt Leety say?"

"What'll she say! Why, she'll say go to it, Moses—an' she'll be proud, jest like she was in seventy-eight."

It scared Chid, an old man like Moses feeling the appeal of Perry, too. After all, the man hadn't promised a thing but hardship and reasonable wages. He hadn't even waved the flag very much.

Chid had heard about men like him: men who were followed blindly because of some quality of leadership that was indefinable, some faith that they instinctively built in men. Joshua Barney, the man who had fought the seventy-six sea war almost single-handed, was a man like that, according to Chid's own father. Men followed him wherever he went, demanding nothing but his leadership as an assurance of victory. "He was, I guess," said Chid's father, who had served as Barney's carpenter rate on the *Alliance* frigate, "America itself, Chid; sort of symbolizing what every man conceived his country to be: valor, courage, gentlemanliness, right, and such things. A man knew, just looking at him, that he'd do what every man-jack aboard expected an American and a free-man to do. Chid, you know what he done when grape from the *Atalanta* sent him nigh kilt to the surgeon's cockpit? A lieutenant rate urged Commodore Josh to strike his colors. We was takin' it then, thicker'n hail on bare decks. 'Consider yourself under arrest for the words,' Josh says, 'an' if you can't fight this ship with the captain below, why, dammit, sir, the captain'll go on deck.' And sore as he was hurt, he clumb to the quarterdeck and, standin' amidst the shot an' fallin' spars, he had us lick that Britisher in thirty minutes flat. An' the remarkable part of it, Chid, is that he surprised nobody. Every man of us expected him to do it an' he did it, all in his stride. What really licked that Britisher, Chid, was faith in this thing that Josh Barney had come to symbolize for us."

Chid could feel that way about Oliver Hazard Perry now. The man's simple straightforwardness and the quiet reverence in his voice when he spoke of America and duty and such contrasted sharply and brightly with the obfuscations which other men made of these simple things. Barney and he, Chid reckoned, were the same: men who took duty and unselfishness and sacrifice as privileges of life. His father had spoken often

of the lofty things which Barney stood for in the years following the war. Curiously, now, there came to Chid the memory of Roswell Crown dying with his eyes on the ensign of that mean privateer and the strange holy light in them.

From deep within Chid something cried out to be shown these sacred and holy things, too. But another part of him reminded him with insistence that these things were valueless to him. You couldn't count them or trade them or even see them as you could coins or nails or the curious shell beads which the reservation Indians valued even above English gold.

No man had ever so stirred Chid before. In a groping way he tried to understand it, to catalogue and evaluate the experience. He couldn't help doing that. Chid was faced with the frustration with which all men of mechanical or mathematical skill are faced when they attempt to rationalize the disturbing selfless deeds and emotions of such men as Barney and Washington, the great men of tradition. But Chid, by nature and by environment, required a ruler when he reasoned. And the peculiarly selfish isolated coastal region which had been his only home had provided no ruler save the one calibrated in hard money and material gain.

Chid was not to forget Perry. In a way he became a symbol for Chid, too, representing something that he was to grasp but slowly. But presently Chid was concerned with only two of the matters mentioned by the soft voice: freedom and liberty. To Chid these were no profound matters, nor did it occur to him that they ever could be. He wanted these things, for they were the means which alone would permit him to dream and plan and build. Nothing stood in the way but to hush that small new disturbing scruple and proceed with his plan.

Chid edged toward the door, making the movement natural in the general circulation about the taproom. Mr. Brown had a few names on the paper; not many but more than Chid had expected to see there. His own name was the last in the list of apprentices. Moses Leet's was the first on the list of the volunteers. And, oddly, following Moses' name was that of Epaphras North, the graver who had so roundly cried that he'd go to no foreign soil. Mr. Perry hadn't even mentioned the

nationality of Presque Isle, another proof, if a man stopped to ponder it, of the faith he had drawn.

Nez was mad, berating Chid. "Damn near two bells," he growled. "Chid, how many times you got to make up your mind? I thought that navy rooster had you hooked."

"He nearly did," Chid said soberly. "He kind of opened my eyes about a few matters. Nez, you certain that Cap Fish has a Letter of Marque, all regular?"

"All regular," Nez nodded. "You'll be helpin' the damned country more'n you'll be helpin' yourself. Chid, you goin' churchy on me just when we're set for some prime fun?"

Chid did not answer. Beyond the post yard there was a queer reddish glow in the sky, like a faded berry stain on the snow curtain. It loomed in the storm as a rising moon is sometimes seen at sea, growing larger, yet having no definite shape.

"What do you make of it?" Chid asked.

Nez studied the glow, then shrugged. "Nuthin'," he said.

"It's fire, Nez," Chid said. "You know it's fire."

"Well, can't somethin' burn without gettin' fussed over it?" Nez said and, clutching Chid's arm, he hurried him along the footpath to the Tatum yard. "Chid, somebody'll spy it. We jest ain't got time to raise no alarm."

Chid broke away, running toward the glow. "It's Goudy's stables," he cried. "Old Beemis is in there, Nez. Hurry! He was drunk and bound to light his candle just to show he wasn't. Come on, Nez."

Ordinarily Nez wasn't one to miss the sport of a fire. But now, with Chid actually started toward the *Blessed Cause*, he wasn't letting a fire interfere. Nez overtook Chid easily, then made a flying leap at him. Chid fell to the snow-covered ground, dragging Nez with him. They tumbled and fought there, Nez good-natured and profane, Chid suddenly mad. He hit for keeps. Once he made Nez howl. But he was helpless to really hurt the tough wiry bulk of Nez. And while he fought, Chid raised the alarm.

Mr. Halliday's post-yard door opened, letting a patch of yellow light stab the storm. Then Tom took up the cry, "Fire! Fire! The stables is a fire!" Nez let go of Chid. "Well," he said, "you raised it. Now let's

skedaddle." But Chid took advantage of the letup and scrambled to his feet, joining the men who poured from the tavern.

The fire, feeding on baled hay and ancient timbers, was a good one. Men were racing from the village now, and above their shouting and the shrieking of the trapped horses, the thin winter-hushed clang of the meeting-house bell pealed. The bucket brigade was forming in a ragged line, bridging the marches from the cove to the burning building.

"There's a man in there," Chid yelled. "Old Beemis is in there, and he's fool-drunk!"

Chid dashed for the stable. He couldn't go near the leeward side at all. The red swirling flames swooped from out the cracked sash, licking the snow, driving him to the windward side. The lower floor was still untouched by fire, but, as Chid threw open the single-door, he could see the flames beginning to creep through some of the upper floorboards. There were other men beside him in the thick hay smoke, some going for the frantic horses. Chid reckoned that Old Beemis would have crept into the hay to sleep off the rum. He climbed the loft ladder, missing steps in the hot gloom. Above him the heat was intense and the fire crackled and burned in the stored hay. Below, the horses cried like demons, fighting the pull of the halters and the bags which had been thrown over their heads.

Chid crawled on the floor, between flanking bales which were not yet fully ignited. The smoke was acrid and blinding, forcing him to breathe through his snow-soaked sleeve. He saw nothing of Beemis, nor was he sure for what to look. Behind him another man was climbing the ladder, groping toward him. Chid caught the flash of gold braid. It was Perry.

"Find that man?" he gasped.

"Nope, not yet. On a night like this he'd be sleeping to leeward sure."

"Good sense, boy. But that's where the fire is."

The flames were catching neighboring tinder now, like a man scattering field fire to clear out varmints. There wasn't much time. Chid lay as flat as he could, inching toward the heart of the flames. Ahead of him, shielding him from the awful heat, a small grain tub moved. Perry was on his belly too, keeping the tub just ahead of Chid with a hay fork, pushing it each time Chid hitched forward.

Beemis lay between a burning bale and a low partition wall. The hay in which he had been sleeping was already burned and consumed. Chid couldn't tell about him. He didn't move, not even when Chid shook him roughly. He still reeked of rum.

"We'll have to drag him," Perry said and took a leg. "He smells hardly worth saving."

"He's an old man," Chid said. "He fought at Bennington last war. He was worth saving then."

"'Twas an unworthy remark," Perry said. "Out with him."

They tugged the bundle, dragging it to the trapdoor of the loft ladder. Burning brands fell about them, and Chid reckoned the roof was due to collapse any minute. Near the trap, an updraught of fresh cold air poured on them, driving the crisping heat away. Perry scuffed loose hay into a pad and sent it tumbling to the floor beneath the hole.

Beemis was a big man, too heavy for either to carry alone. But they each took one of his arms, hanging him like a drying bear hide, then let him drop to the hay-softened floor.

The entire building, fanned by a gust, suddenly burst into an ominous crackle, the flames first licking backward as if to take a sly taste of what was to follow. Chid and Perry followed their burden to the lower floor, now suffocating as a making-bake oven. Outside, men yelled. Their buckets, reaching the line end but half-filled, dashed ineffectually against the stable. Each breath that Chid took burned sharply, like a draught of the worst dunder taken with green-tail onion, a croup cure that was worse than the croup. Chid yelled, trying to bring some help, but he knew he wasn't making a sound.

"You'd better cut for it," Perry gasped. "Fetch some help. We can't make it alone."

Chid knew that. What strength he had left was scarcely enough to drag himself to the square red patch of stable door and the good cold outside.

"You go," Chid said, and he pushed Perry roughly toward the door. Then he lay flat, getting his breath and his sense, and when he felt the blackness leave him he tugged at Beemis.

He couldn't say why he had pushed Perry out, giving him the chance of escape. He'd never done anything like it before. Wildly, trying to

move the bulk of Old Beemis, he thought some nonsense about Perry's value. To the country, he supposed. But there wasn't any sense to it. He'd just done it; hadn't even thought about it before. ~~Wait~~

Chid had moved Beemis only a few inches when they found him. But Chid didn't remember those last minutes in the raging flames and awful choking smoke. He was suddenly in the night, the cold, melting snow warm about his bare legs, and he was breathing bitter, stinging air which cleared his brain. His trouser legs had smoldered away, and his great-coat had been consumed to the length of a small sea jacket. Mr. Diggers was chumping handfuls of snow against the smoldering red cloth patches of his clothing, and some place below him, on his legs, there were cruel stabbing hurts.

Another bucket brigade had formed, leading to a hole chopped in the Boggtown Brook. "Set here, boy," said Mr. Diggers; "you'll feel some better bym-bye. I got to tend bucket."

"Where's Captain Perry?"

"Over to Mr. Halliday's, singed slight, but he'll be all right," Mr. Diggers said. "He said he was all done in when you shoved him th'ough the door, boy; couldn't've breathed another blessed secunt. You'll have a fast friend at that there shipyard o' his'n."

Mr. Diggers legged it. Chid could see the bundle that was Beemis lying blackly in the snow and partly sunk into it, like a currant in dough. It was alone, away from the crowd which surrounded the doomed stable. He felt better now, and he suddenly felt the cold, a thing which he had thought he'd never mind again. A figure came to the bundle, spread a blanket, and rolled Beemis into it; then came to Chid. It was Nez, oddly furtive.

"You be all right, Chid?" Nez whispered. "Look, you feel good enough to tote?"

"Tote what?"

"Beemis," said Nez. "He's nigh done in, but he'll live to pay for this yet."

"Who'll bother Beem?"

"Judge Goudy will," Nez said. "He's that sore 'bout his stable burning, Chid, an' he swears to have Beem in the choky for life. Beem is kind o'

related to me, Chid, somewhere's in our damn' fambly. I mean to spook him away. You kind o' owe me help, Chid."

"Did I hit you hard?"

"Shucks, don't talk silly. But it's a good way to get things done. You totin'?"

Chid said he would. They tied the paired blanket corners together, using reef knots, then took the loop, one at each end, and carried and slid Beemis over the snow. The bucket brigade was going full blast, chanting as the buckets passed along the long line, and making noisy splashing work of it. Mr. Halliday's Tom stood near the hot fire end to take orders for thirst killers. Nobody noticed Chid and Nez. Beemis was heavy, in the same way a sack of grain is heavy, and Chid was puffing in no time.

"Is he hurt much, Nez?"

"I ain't looked hard," Nez replied. "Burned a mite, but I reckon he don't feel nothin'. Beem was prepared, Chid. A man's smart to keep a certain amount of liquor in him in case he meets up with accidents. It dulls the pain o' them. But I don't cal'ate to have him wake up in no donjon, an' discover hisself in misery with no chance to get easement for it. Like I said, he's related."

Nez was in the lead, guiding Chid down the river path. The snow had fined slightly under a sharper wind turned to the east of north. It stung as it beat down on Chid. The stable still burned ruddily beyond the tall dry marsh weeds in which they walked, and Chid knew it was a goner. Its light helped, making the unbroken path a faint pink ribbon in the surrounding purple shadows. At the Tatum yard Nez turned, skirting the fence toward the river.

"Where we taking him, Nez?"

"Onto the *Blessed Cause*," Nez said without turning. "Ain't no safer place for Beem than to sea."

Chid agreed. Poor Beemis, with his reputation about town, would be hunted down like a sheep-killing dog. Judge Goudy had warned Beem often enough in his court. Beemis, this time, had destroyed property in his drunkenness, and, to save his face, the judge would have to commit him as a proven public enemy.

The *Blessed Cause* was beside the Tatum east wharf, her stern lines

reaching off into the rolling river and her starboard bow snuggled against the piles. Flares moved on her deck. Snow was being pushed overside through the freeing ports by men with board drags, and high aloft, unseen in the black sky, unsheeted canvas rustled harshly. Chid knew that the schooner was preparing to sail.

"It's 'way past nine," Chid said. "You said nine sharp."

"Cap's been waitin'. For me an' you."

Chid said nothing. He was doing, at last, what his sense and reason told him was smart and profitable. But that odd something, like a slight belly pain, was telling him something, too. Chid, actually on the schooner, had no trouble forgetting the pain.

"What you got, Nez?" a voice called.

"A feller was hurt," Nez said. "Give a hand, Marky."

"At the fire? Alec Drake jest come aboard; he was sayin' she's a dandy."

They laid Beemis on a hatch cover, snow-cleared and already battened down for sea. Nez, oddly, paid Beemis no more attention. "Chid," he said, "I want for you to meet up with Cap Fish. Step below. Cap's waitin' an' anxious."

"You better take care of Beem."

"Beem's all right. Step below, Chid."

Chid dropped down the ladder, feeling with relish the absence of the bitter wind. He stood in a small alcove from which opened several low doors, evidently to cabins. One opening, into a passage, led forward to a small man-filled space. Nez opened the after-door without knocking, pushing Chid before him.

"Well, Cap," Nez said, "this here is Chid Alwyn to last."

Chid saw before him a small wizened man, clean-shaven and bald-headed. He sat in a winged fireside chair, oddly out of place in the small cluttered cabin, and seemed hardly to half fill it. His feet reached the floor only because he kept his toes pointed downward. Chid noticed the eyes most. They were a sharp, inquisitive gray, shrewd and cruel, and capable of outstaring a timid man. Chid thought him a good man to make money and probably fair, becoming hard and cruel only if he had to.

"Your serv't," Chid said, looking him straight in the eyes.

Captain Preserved Fish held Chid's eyes for a long searching moment. Then he stood up, as small a man as Chid had ever seen. But there was nothing about him to make Chid laugh. "I don't want servants," the captain said. "I want men who can fight and who I can count on, win, lose, or draw. You'd naturally have a question to ask. I'm prepared to answer before we talk articles, Alwyn."

"A-yep," Chid said, "it's fair burning me. What in blazes are you and Nez Nott so all-fired set on shipping me for? I'm only a carpenter."

"That's the right question," Fish said and sat down, seemingly pleased. "Well, first we need carpenters. There's but Nott and Antwine Something-or-other. The right kind of carpenters is as essential as gunners, times. Some of the boys don't hold with me on that, but I've been out on a Letter before, and I know. Second, Alwyn, Nott states that you're dead set on some prize money. That's the kind of talent I want. It's better than notions about patriotism and a hate for the British for assuring me the loyalty I need in this business. Question answered?"

"A-yep," said Chid, "answered good."

"Say 'sir,'" Fish said sharply.

"When I'm signed on, it will be sir," Chid said.

"Chid, you better sign," Nez said. "I been to a heap o' bother to fetch you away from that charmer Perry. I thought sure you was a goner, in the taproom there. You was a-gazin' on him like he was a heavenly angel just lit down to pass out salvation. This here's a smart man's salvation, like you yourself's been rantin' on these last weeks."

Chid laughed. He'd been wondering himself how he had managed to veer so far from his purposes these last hours. First it had been Noah Brown, talking a sort of sober sense; then Captain Perry, stirring emotions Chid hadn't suspected owning. Standing before Captain Fish, Chid had the conviction that at last he had caught up with something that he had been aiming at for a long time.

Fish opened a page of his log and dipped a quill, offering it to Chid. Chid scanned the page-head above the listed names.

—for three months or until a major prize has been taken at no wage but a share in all prizes, duly adjudged, valued, and condemned by a prize court of the United States of America, as by law provided,

in that part set down following each name, said part being the proper part of the sum remaining after the lay of the owners and of Preserved Fish, Master, has been subtracted, by common calculation, from the whole. . . .

"What's the lay?" Chid asked.

"One thirty-second."

"With only three carpenter rates?" Chid said. "Seems 's if a man might be worth more."

"One thirty-second," Fish said, his eyes steely.

Chid took the quill. Sometimes, trading, you met a man as smart as you were, or a little smarter, and it took a good head to know when to quit milking.

"Make a cross," Fish said.

"Chid can write," Nez said with pride.

"I reckon you ought to know I'm bound out," Chid said. "I'm running out on my papers."

"You ever murder anyone?"

"Nope."

"Well, sign then," the captain said, amused. "Privateers ain't fussy so long's a man's still breathing."

Chid wrote his name, clumsily because he didn't often have occasion to use the quill. Fish carefully wrote "1/32" after it, then, scanning the list, crossed four names through with the quill.

"Hail the mate below."

"The mate. . . ?"

"Aye, Mister Tinker," Fish growled. "He's likely on deck. Lively, boy!"

"Yes, sir," Chid said, and climbed the companion ladder.

Mr. Tinker, in a great-coat which reached to his feet, was superintending the last of the deck work under the flares. Snow-bound sheets and halyards were being freed, and warm water from the galley fire was being poured over all the lower blocks to free them of ice. Mr. Tinker went below immediately Chid spoke to him, saying nothing.

A moment later, from the quarterdeck, his pipe shrilled, like a banshee in the storm, and the cry of "All hands!" went over the schooner in a

rippling wave. Men came from the watch below, and from dark places above the deck. Chid guessed there were thirty-five in the ragged line they formed along the weather bulwark, spaced between the tarpaulin-covered guns now lashed inboard behind closed ports. Chid, finding Nez, stood with him and an onion-smelling man in queer logger's leatherstockings, obviously a pea-souper. Mr. Tinker called the roll, reading from the log.

"All present, sir," Tinker said when he'd called the last name, which was Chid's. "I'd say we're ready to sail."

The captain whispered to Mr. Tinker, who touched his forelock and again faced forward.

"Barns, Mennenger, Clark, and that bastid you call Snitchy," he called, "captain orders ye aft. Lively, now!"

The four men slouched aft, not very willingly. Chid saw then that Captain Fish had brought a large pistol from under the folds of his coat. Mr. Tinker had taken up a gunwad screw in his hand, its hooked and twisted point gleaming cruelly in the flare light, and behind them six musketeers had lined themselves.

Fish looked without emotion on the four hands who toed the edge of the quarterdeck break.

"Get off the ship," he intoned flatly.

Mr. Tinker made a stirring motion. It awakened the men from their dumbfounded staring. One of them, hands outspread, took a step toward the captain, but Fish's gun was pressing his chest before the step was completed.

"Get off," Fish said with a curious snarl, "and never mind your chests. You'd have sent us off in the boats on colder seas than this without our possibles, we hadn't found you out. Get ashore."

The men filed over the brow and into the shore shadows.

"If you see a head, shoot it, Mr. Tinker," the captain said, "and any more, they go the same way. But you might mention that there won't be land so handy. Get her under plain sail, Mr. Tinker—it's a prime night to slip to sea."

Chid wasn't of much use in the ensuing activity. It was a job for seamen. Immediately the staysail and storm trysail on the main were set. Hawasers came in wet and stiff, the sails were sheeted in, and the

schooner ghosted away from the wharf under press of the tide and the gale in her almost naked spars. About all Chid did was to throw the flares overboard when Mr. Tinker spoke from the darkness of the quarterdeck.

"Home the heads'l," Mr. Tinker called. "Helm up, man! Way up and meet her."

The bow of the *Blessed Cause* fell away from the land, and the wind passed over the stern, filling the storm sails with a muffled crack that sent snow and thin ice shapes showering to the deck. With gathering speed the black schooner bucked the river drift ice and growled her way seaward.

Chid, shivering in the waist, which was deep with frozen uncoiled line, found Nez. He was cutting a chew to drive off the seasickness which he feared more than enemy action, a navy topman having recommended tobacco as the only stave-off.

"How's Beem?"

Nez chumped his chew, softening it, making a mouthy sound.

"Beem's dead," he said after a while. "We'll have to scuttle him at sea, I reckon. He was dead when we brung him on board, Chid."

Chid shivered, not from the cold. It was curious. Old Beemis himself had recommended rum in preparation for just such an occasion not four hours ago.

"I had to get you here," Nez said. "I jest had to after that Perry made himself a real hero for you. I was scairt I couldn't, for Perry, over in Halliday's, was hollerin' for you. Totin' Beem was the first thing I struck onto. This ship had to have you, Chid. Them four hands the captain beat ashore was plannin' to take the schooner and sail her on the account once Fish had 'em through the navy patrol. Cap, he got onto 'em, but he didn't know how many to maroon till he was certain o' you. Three on 'em were carpenters, you see."

"There must be more."

"'Course. But Cap like reckons they're scairt yaller. It's why he had to be sure o' you, an' you see you was almighty important, Chid. But I never did 'spect I'd have to spook you to what you always wanted to do, I never did. Chid, you ain't sore, are you?"

"Nope," Chid said, meaning it. "I figure you did me a favor, sort of.

That damn' recruiting kind of got me this time. But, blame it, Nez, I wished I'd known. I'd never have settled for only a thirty-second lay."

Nez spit expertly and grinned. "Chid," he said, "you're the one-thinkin'est man I ever met up with. Don't you lay store by nuthin' but money?"

Chid thought it over. He guessed that there were other things too, but they all seemed to start with money and what money could buy and make of a man. Money and freedom. Chid had never had much of either. But both were in sight now. In fact, he already had the freedom; had, in a way, earned it. It had been an effort to fight that insistent inclination to stand with Noah Brown and Captain Perry and the vague but somehow warming good things they stood for. For a while, back there in the tap-room, he hadn't even wanted to fight, but just follow with the stark faith of Moses Leet and his burning eyes.

He was glad that Nez had contrived to get him away; to fight himself, as it were, and come out where he had started. There was a stubborn satisfying honor in that, prideful and warming.

"I guess," Chid told Nez, "money is just a tool. What I really lay store by are my ambitions. I just need the money to fashion 'em around fair and sound and smooth."

"Ambitions!" Nez snorted. "Hell, Chid, I only got one, an' my stom-mick takes care on it. You ain't never goin' to have no fun till you get shut of your ambitions. There ain't nuthin' worser to trip a man up."

The *Blessed Cause* was off the untidy wharves of Noank, making fast going of it, so close that a good spitter could make the shore easy. A militia sentry fire gleamed on the point, like a baleful red eye winking in the snow gusts. Abreast of it the schooner was hailed by trumpet.

"What ship is that out there?"

"*Blessed Cause*," Mr. Tinker shouted across the dark channel. "Whyn't you be that concerned 'bout your damned Noank smugglers when you spy 'em?"

"Where you bound?"

"Where you Noankers ain't got the guts to go."

"Hunh! What cargo?"

"Cargo!" Mr. Tinker boomed. "Why, preserved fish, you goddamn by-product, you!"

Chid joined in the hilarity of the watch on deck. Nez roared, clapping him hard on the back. It was a good start, off to sea with the ring of laughter on deck; a happy ship, the pea-souper named them. Chid, dropping below, hoped it would be a lucky ship, too.

Chapter Four

A SULLEN WINTER dawn fell on the *Blessed Cause*. She was running free, on the starboard tack, riding the long breaking swells that rolled down the Atlantic from the Arctic, skirting the unseen sandy south shore of Long Island. There were two men on wheel watch to fight the constant threat of yawing. Her plain sail was set now, each sail full-bellied and comfortably sleeping but showing an inclination to collapse as the vessel slid into the deeper of the calm water valleys.

There had been no trouble making the sea turn off Montauk. Neither British nor Yankee ships attempted a close inshore patrol in storm, and Preserved Fish, threading the shoals by lead, had raised nothing all the long night.

Dawn had been an anxious moment, but the gray curtain had lifted only slightly, leaving visibility less than a cable's length, and remained there. The snow had stopped now, and the wind failed to pick up with the daylight. The sea was bitterly cold and tremendously disturbed, but no sail appeared on any quarter. The *Blessed Cause* was like a lonely star in outer space, dipping and rolling in her sweep to the southward.

Chid, being a carpenter rate, had not been required to stand deck watch. He was glad of that, for he was utterly tired and weary. Mr. Tinker, who, in warm lantern light and shed of his shaggy great-coat, seemed a kind man, had roused out some pork grease from the galley for Chid's leg burns. They were forming into blisters, becoming baggy with water, and Chid was glad that he had no britches legs left to chafe them into raw wounds.

The grease was simmer-warm but hard enough to stick to his legs. In places there were patches of his small-drawers stuck into the flesh. Mr. Tinker drew them out with kindness; then swathed both legs from

ankle to above the knee in soft picked gun wadding over a clean linen cloth which, Mr. Tinker explained, his wife had made him take to tear into nose rags. He bound outside, spiral-wise, making the warmest pants Chid had ever known, long strips of light stuns'l canvas.

"There you be, youngster," Mr. Tinker had said when he had finished, "wormed, parceled, and served, like a blasted pair o' lower shrouds. A man can't work or fight when he's bothered by ailments, sez I."

Chid had simply crumbled backward from the berth edge upon which he'd been sitting, falling into a heavy sleep at once. Nez and the pea-souper, whose name was Antoine Paul Marestière, had gone forward to make certain of the hawse-hole and spill-pipe plugs, calking between the wooden stoppers and the entering chain links. When Mr. Bolt, the second mate, could think of no more sailing chores for a carpenter to do, they came to sleep in the same berthing space with Chid. It was the room which Chid had seen from the after-companionway, not a forecastle but a steerage, like the berthing space of the boat-steerers of a whaler. Drake, the master gunner, and Mr. Lefferts, who was the same captain of marines who had come looking for stragglers at the Wagon's and Seamen's, berthed there, too. Chid didn't hear them roll into the narrow storm-railed berths, nor the constant thumping on deck as the watch kept the ice spades scraping at the freezing spray which threatened to get lumpy and log the ship down. His weariness was almost a form of drunkenness, poisoning him.

But he felt all right when the captain of marines roused them all at dawn, pulling the shuck-filled bags from under each and rolling them onto the cold bare board slats from between which came the dank fester-ing smell of bilge.

Chid, dressing, didn't mind the motion. He hadn't been to sea very often and, by rights, should have felt the sickness. But it was Nez Nott who was sick. He lay on the berth boards, breathing in the bilge smells, not caring about anything. Chid tried to rouse him, but Nez only groaned and formed himself into a tight huddled ball.

"Let him be," Antoine told Chid. "Bym-bye, oops he comes. Den you' fran', she feel better, wasn't? Hall good sailors catch it. Dat's how day t'ink, 'Ah'll sail de ship fast lak anyt'ing so's Ah come back home queeck, hein?' Ever' tam Ah gets sick, mebbe one-two hour when she sail, me."

"He's been to sea more than I have," Chid said. "It must be awful."

"Non, non!" Antoine grinned. "She don't work when she lak dat. Is lucky, dat fran'."

Chid borrowed Nez's wool stocking cap. Nez's shoes were too small by far. The marine captain, who was pulling on white dress pants, offered Chid a pair of marine's boots, taking them from a wooden sea chest which stood, lined with others, inboard of each berth. They fitted, and Chid said his thanks.

"Hold on, sonny," Lefferts said. "I don't pass out practically new English-captured boots for the sport of hearing them squeak on strangers. You got any cash?"

Chid said yes, some. He needed sea clothing, but had figured that what he had might do if they were to continue to the south or if, as he hoped, the voyage would be short. But boots were a necessary expense. Chid put his hand into his stern pocket, feeling for his wad of eighty dollars. It was gone. Yet he recalled, after Noah Brown had refused it, lashing it with a rawhide whang and tucking it securely into that very pocket. The pocket hadn't burned through, and that struck Chid as odd. "I guess," he said, slipping off the boots, "I don't have money anyway."

The captain eyed him keenly, his fat pig face puckering around the deep-set pinkish eyes.

"What lay you got?"

"One thirty-second," Chid said.

"You cute little bastid!" Lefferts said without humor, "damn near as good as my own, and you don't have to stand watch or fight. Tell you what I'll do. You make over a twentieth of it and the boots are yours, we take prizes or no."

Chid considered it. He needed the boots. But it was a bad trade, for he had no doubt that they'd take prizes. The boots might, with a few good captures, cost him a hundred dollars or more. "Nope," said Chid, "I'll make out without 'em for a while."

Lefferts snatched the boots angrily and threw them into his chest, then strode aft and up the ladder to the deck. Chid didn't miss the look of active enmity the captain gave him.

"Is good t'ing you didn't was," Antoine told him, nodding his approval of what Chid had done. "Hall tam hims make dat. Ever'boday on de

goddamn ship owes him from de lay. Fo' what? Nozzing! Well, mebbe somezing—boots, de shirt, de knife, hall t'ing him steal from de Eenglish when we take de prize ship. But not me; non! You want dunder, Cheed, you mus' spik nice on Leffert an' mak hims part o' de lay. Is bad feller; ver' bad, by Gar!"

Chid said he'd be damned if he would. But he really needed those boots. Even here below decks and out of the wind he was bitterly cold. The unpainted deck was saturated with a salt wetness and felt like raw lake-ice under his bare feet. Antoine looked at him in sympathy, then suddenly brightened.

"Have it, mel!" he chirped. He was, Chid thought, like a child eager and anxious to please and incapable of hiding from his face or manner any emotion which he felt.

Antoine slipped into Nez's shoes; then gave Chid his own heavy moc-casins, unlacing the babeesh cords to make them large enough to fit Chid's big feet. Without stockings, which Chid did not have anyway, they just fitted, feeling warm at once.

Chid, grinning, said his thanks. Antoine wouldn't hear. He walked the two-berth length in testing steps, as if wearing Nez's shoes, once excellent cordwainer's handiwork, was reward far too much. Chid felt that he had found a friend.

Mr. Tinker looked in, asking about Chid's burns. "A hatch cover come adrift last night," he said. "You better batten her down again."

"Yes, sir," Chid said. "Look, I had some money stolen from me last night. What do you reckon I ought to do about it?"

Mr. Tinker took on a sober look. "How much?" he asked.

"Eighty dollars."

"Why," Mr. Tinker grinned, "that ain't money, Chid. Not on a privateer, it ain't. Couple-three weeks from now you'll have so much you wouldn't even miss eighty dollars."

"Well, that's good," Chid said, "but I don't like to be taken in. The point is, the money's mine."

"'Course 'tis," Mr. Tinker conceded, "and I'm goin' to mention it to the captain, Chid. You just belay the matter till then. He'll catch the scallywag, Fish will."

It seemed to Chid that the mate was being too eager to hush him, to retain his trust. He couldn't believe that the captain would mix into such a matter. But he didn't think about it then. Antoine was urging him forward, through the hold, to the carpenters' storeroom in the bow of the vessel.

The tools weren't much, and they were in fearful shape. Every cutting edge needed both grinding and honing. The only bright tool in the lot was a double-bitted ax of a pattern which Chid had never seen before. Antoine swung it proudly after testing the edges with his horny thumb. "Him b'long to me," he told Chid. "Logger on de Big Otter, mc."

It wasn't much of a job repairing the loose hatch cover. Antoine, with an exactness unreasonable to expect from such a heavy field tool as the double-bitted ax, shaped out new pine wedges, driving them with the flat of the shiny steel head. Chid calked the hatch seam, using oakum from the storeroom cask.

Just before the change of the watch the cook banged his spider, and Chid got in line, filing aft. He had borrowed Nez's kid and pannikin, and his sheath knife. Nez was still curled miserably on his damp, evil-smelling berth, not interested in anything.

Chid took the ladle of mush only, not caring for the black tarry molasses which he could have had. He took two hardtack biscuits from the barrel under the watchful eyes of Mr. Lefferts, then held out his pannikin for his rum dot. The food wasn't much nor was it appetizing, but, oddly, Chid ate with relish, sopping the biscuits, which were not nearly as hard as they would be later, into the rum.

He sat on the cold deck with Antoine and the master gunner, Alec Drake. Drake was from Monmouth, in New Jersey, a quiet sober man of nearly fifty whose legs were completely laced with distended blue veins. Drake looked perpetually sad, as certain breeds of hound dogs do. He was stoop-shouldered, his hair was iron-gray, and he moved slowly and painfully, Chid guessed, because of those horrible blue legs.

Chid's mates were a strange assortment of men and boys. Besides the coastal men there were a few Canucks, like Antoine, two Negroes, and a morose, bleary-eyed Mohegan Indian from Groton. The coastal men were obviously used to the sea, for they set the shipboard habits for the others, Chid included. The gunners seemed to be navy-trained men.

They alone wore any semblance of a uniform, the stiff canvas breeks and double-wool striped shirts and stocking caps of the frigate men.

He felt an odd faith in the gunners, and in their master, Drake; more than he felt in either Mr. Tinker or Mr. Bolt, the mates, though Mr. Tinker, Chid reckoned, was a man you couldn't be sure about. There was something sly about him, and Chid suspected that he made it a point to create the feeling that he was a true friend as well as a man's superior officer. Captain Lefferts, Chid felt, was an openly dangerous man, who took no pains at all to conceal his disdain for everybody on board save his six uniformed, constantly watching marines.

Marky, the hand who had hailed them last night, was a Liverpool Britisher, a small wiry man with a perpetually ingratiating manner. "I'm all that's left of the *Cutbarb*," he told Chid, talking without encouragement. "Fish, he sunk her uncommon fast, he being under chase by our convoy sloop at the time. But when his boat pulled back to this here vessel, why there was Marky, stowed neat under the foresheets. It seemed a good way to get to America, Mr. Alwyn."

"Hims ver' good hand," Antoine said. "First, Cap she want for to cut de throat"—Antoine demonstrated, drawing his belt knife across Marky's prominent Adam's apple—"but Marky, she smart feller an' say how she know de English signal. Is come in handy, dat, eh, Marky?"

Marky admitted it had. On the last voyage Fish had penetrated into the very center of the Christmas merchant fleet under the British secret code hoist supplied by Marky, and taken five prizes before the fleet had scattered beyond further chasing. "But Antwine's wrong about the capting slittin' my wizzen, sir," Marky offered. "He's a prime gempman—an' no bleedin' murderer. I lay my last that if a hand rated killin' Capting Fish 'ud hang him decently from a yardarm. In the British service even a ship's boy's got a right to die like that."

Marky said the voyage, though short, had been a handsome one. Being a stowaway, he hadn't shared in the prize money, but Fish had presented him with a voluntary gift of five hundred dollars if he'd agree to sail again. He hinted that he held the speedy success of this voyage in his hands, though he was quick to say that Captain Fish's undeniable cuteness was needed also. Marky said that heavy guns were all right and necessary for defense, but for offensive work against merchantmen there

was nothing like the captain's cuteness and Mr. Lefferts's deadly marines. Nothing could defeat them, save an armed ship; and Fish, Marky guessed, wouldn't be foolish enough to tangle with one if he could avoid it.

"He sees straight, does the captin'," said Marky. "Gi' him the spoils an' leave the glory to the Navy an' damn fools. Mr. Alwyn, d'you ever witness seven men capture a prize single-handed? Well, you attach your blinkers onto Mr. Lefferts an' his lads."

Chid didn't think much of the marines. They messed alone, grouped about the pump forward of the mainmast, and took pains to show their hatred of the seamen. They were in dress uniforms of peculiar style, British-looking and flashy, which Antoine, recounting the prizes which had provided the various parts, said they were in fact. Each marine always carried his musket with bayonet fixed, like a militiaman on parade, and the deck was never innocent of at least half the command. The long muskets caused no end of trouble by fouling in the rigging as the marines paced their regular beats, and Mr. Tinker and Mr. Lefferts were always at loggerheads about it in a jovial, joshing way. Mr. Tinker said he worried about cut lines. Mr. Lefferts said regular beats and full service kits and uniform was the only way he had to build and preserve the discipline he required of his "hellcats," as he termed his command.

There was little conscious discipline among the seamen. They were easy-going and docile, and had no snap whatsoever. Even Mr. Tinker, for an officer, seemed almighty free and easy. He seldom raised his voice except to pass an order aloft, which, on the *Blessed Cause*, wasn't often. She was a fore-and-after, with but two pairs of yards, and sail handling was done almost entirely from deck, making an easily worked, fast, and nimble vessel not to be improved upon for privateering.

Mr. Tinker put Chid to fox-wedging the locust trunnels of the gun carriages. "There's other work a'plenty," Mr. Tinker said reasonably, "but I don't believe in just makin' work for a man. So long as we can fight the ship. It's what we're all here for—and there's no commodores or owners to come nagging about the last splinter in sight. How's Nez?"

"Still motion-sick. He'll soon come out of it."

"'Course he will—and he'll have to take a ragging, too. Chid, we're soon in the way of the Jamaica Line. You do one carriage to once only. 'Tain't smart to tie up more'n one gun at a time."

Chid went to work with enthusiasm. The gun captains were civil, joking with him about his friend Nez but approving his careful, quick work. The gun crews were at handling practice, striving for smartness. Alec Drake, when Chid came to him with his mallet and rock-elm wedges, laid off and lighted his iron pipe. Drake and his crew, Chid noted, were, like the others, excited.

"We're likely out first, lad," Drake said. "Nobody but Fish would clear in a blitherin' snow-gale, and anythin' at sea is more'n probable patchin' gear 'stead o' spoilin' fer prizes. We got every chance to fetch up suthin' interestin', lad."

"What's the Jamaica Line?" Chid asked.

"Well," Drake said, searching for the words that always seemed to come hard for him, "it's sort o' a path in the water, say. The British send up their stores from Jamaica on it, to Canady an' the North Atlantic fleet. Marky, like he was hintin', reckons some paymaster boats is due. You got a prime chance to see how good your wedgin' is before many glasses, lad."

"Marky said the marines do the fighting."

"Well, we'll see," Drake said and became quiet.

Chid felt a joyous pride in the schooner. He had worked on many like her from keel up, and no part of her was strange to him. But he had never before sailed on one, and he felt, as does every man who sails, that intangible something which a living ship gives forth. Poets name it the soul, and plain men name it heft or feel and with affection call their ship "the old bitch," but all men feel it and have for even the worst-mannered hull afloat a fierce, loyal pride.

She swept southward and westward now under every last sail, sheets started and halyards and weather stays thrumming like the plucked strings of a parlor harp, their songs prolonged into infinity. The seas had become long and flat and green-topped. The ice in the rigging had tinkled to the deck and gone, and in the strengthening steady breeze there was the first hint of more moderate weather.

The mate wasn't one to make the vessel shine, nor was there need to, her usefulness to him and his company being but a matter of a few months. But the *Blessed Cause* was ready for action, and her people were united in the common cause of taking all the prizes possible. Cap-

tain Fish hadn't appeared on deck. Mr. Tinker or Mr. Bolt worked the ship, and Mr. Lefferts and his sour marines policed her.

Just before noon Mr. Tinker asked Chid to sound the well. There was under seven inches in it. When Chid reported, the mate noted it on a shingle which was nailed to the binnacle and said there was no need to pump yet. Then Chid, feeling very useful, held the big log reel over his head, a hand on each axle, while Mr. Tinker ran the stray line out into the creamy turbulent wake. When the first knot had passed through his fingers, he called sharply for one of the wheel watch to capsize the glass. Sand and line ran out, and when the glass was empty Mr. Tinker stopped the line smartly and, while Chid hauled in the line and the cap-sized chip at the bitter end, made some calculations.

"Some better'n I reckoned," he said, his mouth not so smiling. "We're gettin' up into the Delaware current an' like to raise somethin' any time. Lad, if Marky's correct, this'll be a famous voyage indeed. You keep a sharp watch. First to spy rates double rum for a week if he's alive to take it."

Chid felt good. The leg burns were not hurting, just itching slightly and pleasantly beneath the warm dressings. Yesterday and last night were ages away, and he didn't even think about them. It was as if all time before dawn this morning was in some remote period of his life which had no connection with what he was doing now.

He had thought but once about his running away. Mr. Brown could, if he wanted to, make considerable trouble. Breaking a bound-agreement was a matter for the magistrates and could lead to jail. But he hardly thought that Mr. Brown would go that far, even providing he did some day catch him. He hadn't seemed either a hard or vindictive man.

After all, Chid had offered to buy out, and at a fair price. Having done that ought to count with any magistrate hearing the complaint. It took him slightly out of the class of a mere runaway apprentice boy. In fact, looking at it another way, it placed Mr. Brown in the class of a slave owner.

He could prove his fair intentions if need be. Eighty dollars, cash in hand presented in court by a runaway, could not be denied as evidence of them, seemed if. But Chid suddenly remembered that he no longer had his eighty dollars. It had disappeared, and not through a burn hole

in the pocket either. It scared him for a minute, worrying him, until he remembered that his share of this voyage, as Mr. Tinker had said, might make eighty dollars not even seem money.

But it left him sore. And it gave reason for his instinctive hatred of Lefferts and the porky moon face over the sweeping blond mustaches. Chid could imagine no one of his bunkmates being a thief save Lefferts.

But it was another matter for him or for Captain Fish to prove it. Whatever else he might be, Lefferts was no fool.

The afternoon watch was just drawing to a close when Antoine, from forward, raised the cry, "Ship! Ship!"

"Where away?" Mr. Tinker demanded with startling alertness.

"Dar! Dar! Ees ship!" Antoine yelled. "Ah spy hims, dar, me!"

Chid couldn't see it at once, not even by following Antoine's excited pointing. The Canuck, Chid reckoned, must have eyes like a forest beast to pick up a tiny triangle of sail against the heaving gray horizon and recognize it as a ship before the old experienced hands even knew it was there.

The stranger, it could be seen a few moments later, was almost downwind, beating northward, some miles south and east. On deck there was orderly activity at once. Each gun was readied, canvas gasket stripped off and the serving tools laid out on the deck. From overside came buckets of sea water for the sponge tubs, shot racks were rigged, and Mr. Bolt, calling Chid and Antoine, dropped below and unlocked the magazine. Chid helped fill the descending rope-net slings with round and bar shot, sending it aloft to unseen hands when filled. The powder boys came down, their clothing soaked in cold sea water. They filled the fire buckets, then shooed Chid and Antoine away.

When they reached the deck, Chid saw that four beef barrels had been sent to the crosstrees and lashed there. From each extended a musket manned by one of Mr. Lefferts's marines. Antoine said that he had personally made the shields; that each was a small cask within a larger one, and the space between was filled with beach rubble. Captain Fish was on his quarterdeck now, holding the high weather side, looking, oddly, in spite of his diminutive stature, every inch an able commander. Mr. Tinker was forward of him. A cutlass swung from a leather belly

band buckled over his great-coat, and two pistol handles appeared in his pockets. Mr. Lefferts had his sword bared for no apparent reason, and he alone, Chid thought, looked somehow ridiculous.

The stranger wasn't large. She was ketch-rigged, in the Bermudian style, having jib-headed sails. It was the first such rig that Chid had ever seen, though he had heard often of their swiftness. Antoine signaled him, breaking into his study of the prettiness of the vessel. They laid out clearing axes and hung a wrecking saw from the trunk bulkhead, then sifted sand over the entire deck. "For de blood," the Canuck said. "Lak ice, whoop! Down de man is!"

"Don't we get arms?" Chid asked.

"Oh, sure t'ing," Antoine said. "Ah got him, me," and he patted his double-bitted ax which was slung, like Mr. Tinker's cutlass, from a rope belly lashing. "You tak what you t'ink keel best, Cheed. Me, Ah lak hims. How you lak de pike?"

Chid had no taste to arm himself. It had never occurred to him that there might be hand-to-hand fighting, with an individual enemy lusting for his blood. In the sea yarns, engagements had always been fought with the guns at reasonably long range. The enemy was the ship. But he suddenly remembered the dried blood and the human hand on that brig which had brought Bob Crown's brother home to die. Thinking about it, he supposed that, as Moses Leet and others had contended, privateering and war itself, in fact, were but a form of murder. Licensed, of course, but by what? By whom?

There seemed nothing murderous about putting a match to the touch hole of a huge impersonal gun. But Antoine's lethal ax, which he could use with such accuracy, or Mr. Lefferts's marines hidden in their safe shields like long-tongued serpents for cool deliberate killing—Chid tried not to think of these things.

The stranger made signs of running off, a maneuver that Marky hailed with delight, for it proved her an enemy and probably valuable. She showed no colors or signals, nor did Captain Fish.

The matter turned into a stern chase shortly, both vessels scudding to the southwest on a fast reach. But the *Blessed Cause* was by far the more powerful and easily outfooted the small islander. Studying her through the glass, Mr. Tinker announced with satisfaction that she car-

ried but two insignificant swivel guns, one on each quarter-break, nothing to bother them.

When they were about a thousand yards off, the mate had Drake touch off a gun. The boom of it sounded flat and somehow disappointing. It caused the stranger to send up the English ensign, but she continued to sail on with annoying swiftness for all her diminutive size.

"Watch out she don't jettison ballast for speed," Mr. Tinker said to Captain Lefferts. "A little feller like that's likely one of Marky's pay-master boats; or dispatches."

"Damn dispatches," Lefferts growled. "There's no money in them. But first one comes near the rail I'll have drilled."

"Do," said Mr. Tinker sweetly.

It struck Chid that even dispatches, provided they could be taken before being sunk, might prove useful to the Navy. But nobody mentioned the possibility, and he said nothing.

It was obvious now that the little vessel would be overhauled within the next quarter-glass. Evidently the stranger realized it as well. She suddenly luffed into the wind and lay a dead thing, facing her bow into the seas and plunging it deep into the attacking crests. On her deck men hastily handed in her sheets and, dropping the halyards a few feet, killed the drive of the sails. She waited, obviously, for a hail and demand, and had no intention of fighting the heavily armed privateer.

Mr. Tinker looked relieved. "Don't light no matches," he said. "Mr. Lefferts can handle this, I reckon."

The gun crews began securing. Above him, Chid suddenly heard the crack of scattered musket fire from the crosstrees. The marines were firing, the ragged deliberate fire of sharpshooters. On the ketch two men fell. The rest dove for the hatches. One man, risking the fire, remained to cut the ensign halyards before disappearing. One of the fallen men struggled to a sitting position, then fell backward and tried again. Mr. Lefferts pointed with his naked sword; a crack sounded from above and after that the figure lay still.

No sign came from the ketch. Save for the two bodies rolling on the deck like lumps of jelly, she seemed utterly deserted. At best there could have been but seven or eight on her. It made Chid mad, the elabo-

rate shaming caution of Mr. Tinker did. The *Blessed Cause* circled the tiny vessel four times, her topsails now dowsed, Mr. Lefferts alert and aquiver, like a coon dog with the coon treed but wanting the real courage to close in.

It was almost dark before Mr. Tinker finally hove to and ordered a boat over. He had, so far, neither shown a flag nor hailed the stranger. It was, Chid thought in disgust, like a great armed bully turning on a small boy without warning or decency, lashing and stabbing even after there was no possible chance of resistance. Fish hadn't said a word since taking the deck. But as the quarterboat was lowered, he said to Mr. Tinker, "Take a carpenter. I don't want her."

Mr. Tinker looked forward with purpose, but Antoine was already sliding eagerly down a boat fall, his ax hanging from his belt like the tail of some nimble tree animal. Chid, though he'd stepped forward, was glad that his name hadn't been spoken. There was something shameful and criminal in taking part in the capture. Those two dead men had been entirely unnecessary; so had Fish's extreme caution, circling the harmless little vessel so often and throwing musket fire into her.

Mr. Bolt said that the two dead men were probably whites. Mr. Lefferts, he said, had urged that it was easier than making prisoners of them, and if white men were left alive, they could lead a pretty good fight against the boarding boat. The rest of the crew were likely niggers, with no heart for fighting and sometimes useful on a privateer, being, if they were Jamaica men, excellent seamen and not sharing in the prizes.

The boarding party was in possession of the ketch. Antoine's ready ax had cut the halyards, sending the sails tumbling downward in billowing white folds. They trailed overside entwined in the severed bowsprit rigging, quieting the seas alongside. The boat shortly put back, and Chid could see that she was now pulled by four buck blacks, naked to their waists. Mr. Tinker in the stern sheets and a seaman in the fore-sheets each had a pistol trained on the rowers.

The blacks climbed to the schooner's deck, looking neither happy nor distressed. Without orders they went forward and to windward, and squatted docilely on the deck there. The boat picked up two men to pull her again to the prize. Mr. Tinker, passing alongside, made jokes to

the men hanging over the rail. "Full of gals," he called jovially, "nice full-modeled gals, just a-pinin' for a boarding party. Hah! and likker!—Lord Harry, wait'll you see!"

They were back again before total night had settled upon the sea. They brought nothing with them but four curious tubs, extremely heavy and requiring the handy billy to bring them on deck. The ketch had been dismasted and stove, and she wallowed in the darkness a swamped wreck, the seas washing her from bow to taffrail. Chid guessed that Mr. Tinker hadn't wanted to burn her for fear of raising an inquiring sail.

Somebody had cast the two bodies overside, an eloquent rite which raised a dead human slightly above a dead ship. It made Chid wonder about Old Beemis. His body was gone at dawn; nobody had mentioned him, and Chid himself hadn't thought of him until this moment.

The *Blessed Cause* was put on the wind, and she reached away on her former course under reduced night sail. Mr. Tinker and Captain Fish went below immediately, following the tubs. After a while Mr. Bolt and Alec Drake, too, were invited down. They, the cabin boy said, were to represent the crew in the matter of the division of the prize. Chid lounged with the hands in the midship, sharing their expectancy. "'Twas hard money, I reckon," one of the men who had boarded said. "Otherwise, she was bare save for stores an' stun ballast. Not even a bottle or a cask, damn them penurious Jamaica skippers."

At the end of the second dog watch, a British system of staggering the watches which Mr. Tinker had borrowed from Lefferts's marine organization and which pleased the hands no end, they were all called aft. The tubs had contained a gold coin shipment. Captain Fish had reckoned it. It came to one hundred and thirty-one dollars, the sixty-fourth lay. "Provided," said Mr. Tinker, who spoke for the captain, "provided, we don't put it through the prize court and have the gov'mint and the brokers and the owners and every other son of a bitch in creation helping theirselves to it."

"It's just a matter of keeping mum," he told them. "No trace of the ketch, and a storm to make foundering a reasonable guess. Mr. Bolt, why'n't you take a vote?"

Mr. Bolt didn't bother to make it formal. It was apparently a cut and dried matter. "Don't hear no deacons singin'," he said without hesitation. "I'd say we favored."

"Well, good," Mr. Tinker nodded. "Line up the hands. Every man-jack gets his money, here and now. That's the kind of dealings Cap'n Fish stands for. Fair and square to all. Alwyn, take care of Nott's lay, seein'g's you're friendly-like."

The actual feel of the cold hard coins gave Chid a peculiar sensation. It was somehow disappointing; there wasn't the free joy in them that he had imagined; rather, in an un-understood way, they seemed like a burden. But he took them eagerly enough, making a poke for them of his shirt front.

"Just a minute, Alwyn," Mr. Tinker said, drawing him away from the others. "Cap'n Fish found your eighty dollars, lad. You ain't to mention it, boy; the cap'n requests you don't. Here 'tis."

"My money was in paper," Chid said, taking the coins.

"Well, the captain got it back for you in gold. That ain't no cause to holler, is it?"

"Nope. Reckon 'tain't," said Chid. "Say my thanks, sir."

"I've done it. The Cap'n don't want no enemies, Chid. He was glad to get it back, but you better keep it hid after this."

"I will; don't you fret."

The bleak New England coast seemed remote and of another world. The weather had turned pleasant, and it was growing warmer almost hourly. Marky, as they gathered on deck after mess, said they were hauling into the Gulf Stream, a channel of hot water that came up from the pit of the earth or somewhere, he wasn't sure just where. He said that all the dead bodies ever drowned in the sea collected in it, and that they drew fish. Some fresh fish was likely tomorrow or the next day. It dampened Chid's enjoyment of the spring-like evening, thinking about Old Beemis and those two poor white Jamaicans who glided lifeless beneath the gray water.

He had two hundred and sixty-two dollars, his one-thirty-second lay. He had more money than he had ever seen at one time; and it was, even to his returned eighty dollars, all in British gold. Chid couldn't, thinking about that small fortune, let himself become depressed.

The off watch made the proper overtures to Mr. Lefferts and brought rum flasks from some secret place below, and somebody in the darkness forward sang a sober song about an idiot girl on October Mountain, not melodious save in its accompaniment of wave music at the run and the thin regular complaining of a fatigued throat block aloft as the schooner ran with the long flattening seas. It became a genial hour, very pleasant indeed. Mr. Tinker, who was inclined to good-fellowship, told some indecent stories. Chid didn't understand every point, but he laughed along with his mates. He had himself a good drink of somebody's kill-care, feeling the liquor lighten him; and it wasn't, after that, very hard to make himself forget about those two murdered men.

Marky reckoned that a whole fleet of paymaster boats might be at hand. They sailed in small squadrons, he said, dividing their cargo and depending upon their speed to slip by Yankee ships. Sometimes they had a convoy, but the storm had likely scattered the fleet, and it was making the best way it could to the British fleet off American waters. Or possibly, Mr. Bolt offered, the *President* frigate, which he heard was cruising on the Jamaica Line, had caught the convoy ship.

Nez came on deck, stepping from the steerage hatch with a sheepish grin on his face, saying he was all right again and had been just too lazy to get up that day. To prove that he was feeling good, he cuffed Antoine playfully and the two tumbled on deck, kicking and biting in the best of humor. "Ho!" Antoine puffed, "hims do de knee, hunh! Nez, you watch out Antoine, she get de ax!" Nez quit then, laughing, and came to sit with Chid.

Chid mentioned that he had his lay, all counted and waiting for him.

"Keep it," Nez said. "I'd never hang onto it, even in the middle of the damned ocean. But for Hannah's sake, Chid, hide it or suthin'. That Lefferts would have picked you like a turkey biddy picks lice. Here's your money roll," and he passed Chid his eighty-dollar wad, still tied with its rawhide whang.

"Where'd you get it?"

"Why, I tuk it off'n you last night, a'fore I turned in," Nez said. "Great airth an' seas, didn't you have that bastardly marine figured out?"

"No. But I'm getting on to him. He tried to trade me a pair of boots

for a share in my lay. I'd be paying hundreds for 'em if this easy picking keeps up."

Nez didn't answer. Chid, following his eyes, saw why. On Nez's feet were a new pair of boots of exactly the same pattern as those which Lefferts had offered Chid that morning.

"What did they cost you?"

"I signed a writin'."

"Tarnation, Nez! Ain't you got more sense than that? Did you read it?"

"Well, not exactly. The letters curl around sort o' confusin' an' mostly I don't bother. Lefferts he read it to me, Chid."

"Nez, we got to get hold of the lay-writing. He wanted a twentieth of my lay for those boots. Gosh knows how much you signed for. This is all my fault for taking your boots, Nez."

"No it ain't," Nez said. "Hell, I don't begrudge my friends anything they're a mind to take o' mine. But it gets me sore to be taken like a trapped varmint."

Nez was all for dropping below on Lefferts at once and settling the matter, and he reached his hand to his shoulder knife significantly. Chid held him back. There was nothing to be gained by seeing the porky captain now. He'd laugh at Nez and reckon one more enemy, a matter probably untroubling to him.

"We can't do it that way," Chid said. "Don't you see the odds? What do you guess those marines tromp about armed for all the time? Lefferts does this all the time, Nez. He runs a business of looting the hands, and he needs his men to save him from some of the hating he must get."

Nez grinned and admitted that seven was more than he wanted to tackle at once. "Well," he said, "I got time. Someday I'll catch him just right."

"Look at it square," Chid said. "All you want is a look at the writing to see that it's fair. Taking it out of Lefferts's hide won't help none."

"Oh, yes, it will!" Nez said. "Chid, you an' me never see eye to eye about what we're fightin' for nohow. But I always know jest where you stand. You jest won't stir 'cept for money."

Before he turned in, Chid hid all the money, over six hundred dollars. He hid it in the bottom of the oakum cask in the carpenter's storeroom

forward, then locked the door. He reckoned it would let him sleep better, knowing the money was safe. It was curious and, thinking about it, troubling, about that eighty dollars he'd lost. It had been returned to him twice, and Tinker had given him the false sum. Chid hadn't the least idea why, but he could imagine it was for no good purpose. It was hard even to try to think of the significance of it.

But he was certain now that Fish and his officers were evil-hearted men. He could feel their evil about him, like a sudden night wind from some corrupt place. It was shocking to find himself a part of it. Two men had been wantonly murdered. Every man-jack of them had accepted his share of the prize money, becoming party to what Chid supposed was piracy. And the schooner was rotten with a system of filthy exploitation apparently condoned by the officers, the hatred it aroused controlled by armed men in the guise of a marine complement.

The schooner was making easy way of it. Drake, coming off wheel watch just as Chid rolled himself into his coarse, damp quilt, said that Fish had come on deck at four bells. He was drunk, but sober enough to order the *Blessed Cause* laid on and off in the vicinity until dawn. He hoped, he had hiccoughed to Tinker, to fetch another paymaster boat.

Chid was almost asleep when he heard an unearthly scream from the deck. It was quiet after it, with only the small noises of the working vessel audible. Lefferts came down the ladder shortly afterward, treading with decent quiet but puffing slightly.

"All done?" Mr. Bolt whispered down the hatch.

"Aye, all done. One of them broke from his lashings, and I had to stick him. But he's over with the rest. No court'll ever know about the prize."

Chid almost retched, feeling sick. Not two, but six men had been murdered in cold blood. Not even remembering the handsome stride he had taken toward making his dreams come true this day could sweeten his troubled sleep.

Chapter Five

THE *Blessed Cause* CRUISED for two days without sighting a sail of any kind. The sea had become warm and gentle, its ripple laughing against the smooth black hull as if to make amends for its black destructive mood just past, and the continuing northerly winds brought the day up bright and sparkling. It was grand, effortless sailing and gave the crew welcome muscle-easing hours on deck.

Antoine and Nez evolved a kill-time game of sorts on the gear-cluttered foredeck which they pursued by the hour, surrounded by the loafing watch-off.

They had lashed a hard-board to the after-face of the wooden knight-heads, and in its center they stuck a small chip of pinewood with spit. The game was to split the chip. Antoine, standing eight paces aft of the target, used his double-bitted ax, throwing it with an easy, lightning-quick swing. Nez used a common bone-handled skinning knife, starting his cast each time from the leather sheath which he carried, on a neck thong, between his shoulder blades.

They were both experts, and their mutual respect expressed itself in constant gentle ragging of each other. Chid enjoyed their quick banter as much as he did their beautiful dramatic skills. It was, as always, a source of wonder to him how Nez so easily and naturally became one of whatever group he happened to join. Chid was aware of the real liking that the men had for Nez. He himself, he knew, did not enjoy their friendship in the same open, unquestioning way. He supposed it was because of his natural caution and uncommunicativeness. He hadn't talked much to any man. He was civil when spoken to and had made conversation only with Alec Drake and Antoine, both of whom had seemed to like

him. But he had listened—an attribute that he had always laid more store by than talking.

Antoine, now, stuck a tiny chip to the target, a bit of whittling difficult to see from a few fathoms away. With utter carelessness he took his casting position, maintaining a belittling tirade against Nez the while, then, stiffening suddenly, flashed his ax in a cold keen arc and buried the blade a full two inches in the hard-board. The chip fell to the deck in two specks.

"Hah, by Gar, Nez!" Antoine chanted, "do dat, you. For Antoine is nozzing, nozzing, my fran'. Hup in de bush Ah t'row mah ax an' Ah cut de flyin' bee in two leetle piece, an' you know what? Bot' pieces is weight exact de same!"

Nez stood on the throwing line, bidding the severed chips be left on deck where they had fallen. "That there ain't so much, even if I did b'lieve it, you tarnal froggy. Down where I do my grazin' a decent man wouldn't even mention a feat's insignificant's that one. Why, hell's a'mighty, Antwine, we kin hit things down there a mortal cain't even see!"

"Is what, hein?"

"Wall," Nez drawled, "you take one o' them skunks. You must know 'em, Antwine, 'cause they don't smell no prettier'n a Frenchie, an' you're all prob'ly related, no doubt. Wall, even a childer in my parts kin hit suthin' you cain't see on 'em every try. Even in plumb darkness we kin do it. Know what 'tis?"

"Non, non! Is no skunks on de Big Otter. Dey all foller you Connecticut soljer when de Franchy chase 'em home long, long tam ago. Hup! Nez, what you' hit dat you no see, hein?"

"Why, the smell o' the critters, you gol-darned Canuck, you. Your brains ain't no nimbler'n your ax. Stand away."

Amidst the laughter Nez threw his knife. It quivered in the deck after an unseen flight and beside it lay two halves of an already halved chip.

"That cost you a hundred dollars," Nez said. "Don't you know when you meet up with a good man, Antwine? Give the money to Chid sometime. Or you want to settle all you owe me for a good dollop o' kill-care right now?"

It was all very pleasant; but behind the good-fellowship of the lazy days on deck Chid was aware of a growing unrest. He had heard whisperings, suddenly silenced when he drew near, and once, passing a group which was stranding rope ends for chaffing gear, he heard his own name mentioned. Alec Drake, too, in a cautious obtuse way had been trying to tell him something for the last day, but had never come to the exact point.

On the evening of the fourth day an American sixteen-gun brig appeared, making mast-head signals. Captain Fish hove to and made his identifying signal of two red swallow tails below the rattlesnake flag and sent the ensign to the main gaff peak. When the two vessels were alongside, the man-o'-war hailed from over the calm sea between. Mr. Tinker, without batting an eye, reported them as the Salem privateer *Diligence*, five days out of Boston with no prizes seen or taken.

"At sunup," Mr. Tinker informed the officer who had mounted the mizzen sheer pole with his speaking trumpet, "we was chased by a Britisher, a forty-four likely, by the looks of her, but sailed lubberly and we shook him."

"Where away?"

"Why, up to north'ard, I guess. You lookin' for a scrap, she'd make you a dandy."

"She'd be suicide for us, I'm afraid. But we're on patrol and better look into her, though it's a frigate job to settle her. Obligated to you, sir—and fair hunting."

Chid heard the shrill of her bosun's whistles, then watched the smart orderly bracing of her yards as she made off on the westward board for the upwind beat. Mr. Tinker smirked behind his smiling report to the captain, up with his rum bottle for the balmy evening air. "It kind of clears the sea for us," Chid heard him say. "If Marky's right we ought to fetch up another of those paymaster boats right soon. We like missed a couple, I reckon."

"There's supposed to be eight of them according to the dispatches Marky stole," said Fish, drawing on a long clay pipe, Dutchman style. "Tinker, don't take any more prisoners. I don't like 'em in this business."

"Aye, sir," the mate agreed. "They leave a trail like a whaler on boilin' day. I'll mention it to Lefferts."

The marine captain had made no effort to collect his share of the prize money which Nez had received. Chid felt keenly his responsibility for getting Nez into the scrape, though he knew that, had it happened to anybody but a friend, he would have felt in no way obligated. Nez, as he had stated, didn't care about the money but, in the right humor, which would probably occur the moment Lefferts tried to collect, Nez might forcibly resent being hoodwinked. For Chid had no doubt that the assignment upon which Nez had placed his mark would contain a damning provision of one-way benefit. Antoine had hinted at such a possibility.

But as yet Chid had no notion of how he might get a look at the writing or get the writing if it did assign Nez's entire lay to the marine captain. Lefferts seldom left the quarterdeck. He took his meals with Fish, and when he made his nightly inspection of the ship he was always accompanied by a file of his outlandish marines. The seamen called them "doodle bugs," and they did not look unlike fat, garish-hued bugs as they paced their beats or climbed into the barrels in the crosstrees.

That night Fish put the schooner about, reaching away from the coast, still under light northerly breezes. Anything beating up the Jamaica Line from the islands had had head winds for almost a week. Fish had but to cross and recross the path and stay clear of ships of the line, both British and Yankee, and the laws of probability would fetch him a fair number of the scattered and delayed pay fleet.

It was another beautiful mild night, prime for drinking, but not many of the hands imbibed. The discipline of the ship would not have stopped them, and Chid, reasoning it out, suspected that it was this unrest which was keeping them sober and on the alert. Without its being obvious, Chid thought he could see a division in the crew; could detect small signs which showed them dividing into two groups.

Alec Drake was slow, as usual, when Mr. Bolt, who had the deck, called for rolling tackles on the main and fore booms. His legs were a livid blue, and he had been rubbing them with turpentine and cayenne, on Antoine's advice, to get the aching tiredness out of them. A marine pricked his stern with a bayonet point, watching the old man hump with relish.

Drake showed no fight, and Chid thought that in itself a dangerous sign. But a hand named Reefer turned on the marine and cursed him with bitter venom, East Boston style and punctuated with spitting which Chid couldn't rightly say was deliberate or the result of the tumbling fury of his cursing. But Reefer earned only a sharp jab of a gun butt in his groin for his pains for Drake.

All the while, a group who had been drinking and were on watch and subject to orders, were left unmolested in the midships waterways. They sang, without melody, a drunken song about "Captain Hake was a Yankee slaver...traded in niggers and worshiped his Saviour."

Chid wished that he could fathom what was going on about him. As yet, though, there was no pattern to it. He wondered about the revolt that Fish and Nez had mentioned. But there was no sense to that now. They were on the account since the capture of that first prize and the division of the spoils without benefit of condemnation by the Prize Court. There was something else; something sinister and evil and dangerous.

Lefferts, oddly, slept aft in the quarterdeck trunk that night and had taken his chest with him. Whatever plans Chid had for rifling it to see Nez's assignment were now destroyed. But the steerage seemed a vastly improved and cleaner place.

Shortly after meridian the next day the *Blessed Cause* took the second paymaster boat. Like the first, she was a Jamaica ketch; a poor ship with patched sails and fished spars that waved like willow wands in the ocean roll as the privateer made her cautious preliminary circling. She struck immediately but the third time around her and with a man on the main truck to watch out for a protecting ship of the line upwind, Fish nodded to Lefferts, and his deadly sharpshooting commenced from the barrel edges in the crosstrees. Four men were down in two minutes. The rest, all husky blacks, threw a small yawl boat into the sea and followed it in wild dives from the deck.

Mr. Tinker was put to run down on the frantically rowing blacks so the marine fire could bear, but before a shot had found the range the crew went overside, keeping the boat between themselves and the schooner. Fish, cackling like a small angry bird, reminded Tinker of his orders; then himself put the *Blessed Cause* a cable's length to wind-

ward of the drifting boat and the black figures clinging desperately to it.

Mr. Tinker understood at once. Grinning his blandest, he jibed the schooner and ran, full and by, down on the yawl boat. With a shudder of horror Chid heard the crunching and grinding of the yawl as it passed beneath the schooner. He didn't look overside. Those blacks who swam away, flinging themselves clear with the aid of the marbling bow wave, died under Lefferts's murderous fire before they reached the quarters.

The wake showed but splinters of wreckage and one lone figure, swimming frantically. Mr. Tinker considered it a waste of time to double back and kill it. "There's nary a thing for him to hang onto, is there?" he asked reasonably of Captain Lefferts. "I'd say the job was done." Chid tried not to watch the desperate black swimming far astern and, after a while, when he did look, he could see nothing.

Chid was ordered over with the boarding party this time. He followed Mr. Tinker and a roll-gaited seaman named Griswold, axing the lockers and bins they indicated. The money was in a small iron-bound sea chest under what had been the skipper's berth in the small crowded cabin. Tinker looked no further when he had found it but bade Chid cut its deck lashings and give a hand lowering it into the boat.

The mate wanted the sticks cut out and the hull stove so she'd sink quickly, but Chid, listening to the ominous gurgling under the floors, opined that the Jamaican would not last ten minutes. She had seemingly taken a terrific beating in the gale and was leaking badly. Probably only constant pumping had kept her afloat this long, and her condition had been the reason for her failure to attempt an escape. The news pleased Mr. Tinker.

"Well, good," he smiled. "I reckon was she in convoy, they'd have shifted to it and abandoned before this. Cap'll be pleased to know. With no convoy to worry about maybe we can search about a mite more open now."

"Look," Chid said, "I didn't ship for this sort of thing."

"What did you ship for?"

"Why, profits," Chid said, "but not trouble."

"Well, I'd say you was doing right handsome with the profits, boy."

And Cap'll take care of the trouble; he's no damn' fool. Don't tell me you've got one of them blasted consciences?"

"No, it ain't that; not altogether. I wouldn't kill men for money myself, but if others kill 'em and I can't stop it, there's no sense letting their money go by me."

"Look at it this way," Tinker said. "Cap's doing a patriotic turn for his country; he's clearing the seas of these plagued devils."

"He ought to be regular about it, bound to his Letter."

"You ever hear of a privateer bound to his Letter? You ever hear of a soldier or a sailor bound to his articles? No, boy, you ain't. They're all out for Number One unless they're pure ninnies or fools. Cap didn't take you for one when you signed on. I wouldn't want to tell him you'd gone softy on him. He was counting on you, in a way."

"Well, he can. I'm under his orders," Chid said. "But I'd sure like to know how all this is coming out."

Chid could heartily wish for no conscience at all now. In the past, when he had been cute or smart and could count it in profit, no conscience had ever come to bother him. He had merely met an opponent on equal footing, in no way dishonorably, and either outsmarted him or been outsmarted himself. There was no reproach in a thing like that. It was life itself, life and survival and, in a way, a man's duty to himself and his aims. But this deliberate and criminal cunning sickened Chid; it rasped harshly on what he supposed was conscience, though he named it to himself a fear and disgust and shame. Mostly, it was fear. As the captain's deeds involved him more and more, he could see no way for himself to keep clear of their rewards. It made him wonder about the rest of the crew. It seemed unbelievable that they, to the last man, were of the caliber of Fish and his officers.

Drake had found two kegs of black powder which he sent to the boat by a sling. The others had all taken some small memento. One man had the whale-oil binnacle lamp and another had a curious conch horn. Reefer had found a pair of flint-lock pistols, rather nicely tooled in the English fashion; but Tinker, with that sudden hard twist to his mouth, dropped them overside without a word. It meant nothing at the time to Chid.

Before he returned to the boat Chid covered two of the slain men with the bunt of the fallen mizzen sail, keeping his eyes averted and not wanting to see the wound from which had come the congealing red pool on the white deck. It was almost an involuntary act; he had no idea why he did it. But in a curious way it seemed to excuse his own participation in the attack and looting.

His act had not gone unnoticed. That evening after the *Blessed Cause* had been put miles away from the scene and the sun was dipping into the western sea, Drake, with studied casualness, sought him out. They hung over the weather rail, feeling the lift of the vessel as she reached gently eastward for another crossing of the Jamaica Line. There was fog to the eastward, following the sun; not dense as Chid had seen it beyond Fishers and Block Islands, but wispy and scattered, like a swale mist.

"It's the end of pleasant weather," Drake said, chumping on a new piece of twist. "You take fog like that, what ain't made up its mind, it can mean anythin'. Easterly winds for certain; mebbe one o' them lashin' gales again. Boy, I seen you cover them two bodies this afternoon. It was a human thing to do."

"I couldn't help it. There was no need to kill those men."

"No need at all. No need for lots o' things," Drake said quietly, "I covered the other two. Mebbe you seen me."

"No," Chid said, "I didn't."

Drake chewed, spitting into the ripple of the run and watching the brown juice mingle with the green seas and pass aft, not saying anything. It was Drake's way, this clumsy hesitation and cautious weighing of his words and his attitude. He had tried it on Chid before.

"There's others on board," the gunner said, "as might consider such a deed human, too. Back in your town, there was four on 'em I know would have been proud to call it so. Three carpenters an' a hand, I recollect, seems 's if."

"They were planning to take the ship and pirate," Chid said. "That's why they were beat ashore."

Drake looked cautiously about, then glanced aloft. When he saw that they were utterly alone he studied Chid, then, with a sudden resolve, talked as freely as he had talked guardedly before.

"That was a cock an' bull yarn the mate told you an' Nott to get you signed on. Them men wasn't going on the account; they was plannin' to keep the hull ship from doin' jest that. Fish, through Lef-ferts, long ago wanted for all of us to do jest what we're doin' now. We was agin it an' said so and figured, bein' half the ship an' more, we was strong enough to stay agin piratin'; make the rest behave. But he had us in a nice situation, boy; signed on, Lefferts creditor to half the hands for advance money and tucked away in your remote little swamp o' a town without liberty, save by twos o' a evening hour. He tuk us complete by surprise, maroonin' them four hands and shippin' o' you two. It sort o' upset the balance—though I'll admit free we never tuk the hull matter serious till what happened. Well, boy, this here way o' taking prizes an' dividin' don't set good wit' some on us. It'll lead but to a hangin' an' disgrace for a man's fambly. D' you ship for a hangin', boy?"

It made Chid think what he had shipped for. Money; yes...and something beyond money. His share of the second prize had been rich, over six hundred dollars, and he now had all the money he had ever dreamed a man might use up in a lifetime, much more than he needed to get his ambitions rolling. And there was Nez's share, too. Nez, in his careless manner, had told Chid to keep it until he needed it, which, he said, might be never. Mr. Bolt, after the reckoning, had lined them up, not bothering to call for a vote. The staggering amount was safely hidden with the rest of his prize money in the storeroom.

"No," Chid said, "I didn't ship for...hanging. I got what I shipped for now. I ain't too proud of the way I got it, but it's right spendable."

"Aye boy. An' you got piracy an' murder, too. Them ain't things you can spend away. You ever think on that?"

"Lots. I already got trouble ashore."

"Well, some on us might never get ashore. Don't worry none about your trouble there till you get by what you got here. Look, this Fish an' Lefferts an' them ain't fools, boy. They know jest where they're goin'. You an' me don't, do we?"

"Nope."

"I figure that arter the last prize has been took some on us is bound to jine them poor niggers. 'Twouldn't take much more'n a gun crew to

work this schooner to some lonesome coast, say Africy or mebbe some Carib island where a man could be forgotten for a spell. You take good prize money like we been takin' divided amongst say ten, an' a man could live a famous life for hisself for a danged long time."

"We can't take paymaster boats forever."

"I'd say no. What we got is luck an' the figurin' o' that cute Marky. Course, there's reg'lar prizes. The French'll buy 'em. A mite o' British blood on the cargo don't count as spoilage to the French. But Fish don't even need more prizes. What's been tuk is sufficient, boy, an' don't you fret but he'll get back all he can o' what's been divided. What I'm fearful o' is the way he'll do it. Boy, where do you stand in all this, to put the matter direct?"

"Why," Chid said, "I guess I'm with whoever'll get me an' my share ashore safe. What d'you want of me?"

"Nuthin'. Nuthin' yet. Jest you stay bowsed down until I speak with some o' me mates for'ard. Trouble is, you come from the wrong town an' we ain't sure o' you an' Nott. We need you, I'll admit, for you'd ekalize that there balance I was sayin' about. We sort o' got some plans, boy."

"Look," said Chid, "you better speak plain or hush up."

"I can't speak plain. I'm doin' this on my own, kind of."

"Why?"

"Well, a fondness, we'll call it, lad. I know about what you did in that there fire what burned that poor sot up. Perry reckoned you about saved his life, he was that tuckered out. He was right grateful, but he couldn't find you to say you so."

"I don't know why I did it," Chid said. "He's a spellbinder, ain't he?"

"No," Drake said soberly, "he's only a human man. What fetches you about him is what he stands for. Mebbe you don't know it right off, but that's what it is. It sort of shines through him. It ain't what he makes o' the things he loves, but what them things made o' him, that a man admires. I know, boy. I see him grow up on the *Constellation* an' I learnt him what he knows about burnin' powder in the long guns. We fought together, we did—in the *Nautilus* gunboat before the Bey o' Tripoli's hellions, an' we bled some an' we starved some; but we never scairt good because Perry don't know the word. Them things make

sta'nch shipmates. Personal, I'd ruther follow Perry than any officer in this hull un-i-verse."

"Well, why don't you?"

"The gov'mint got penurious a year or so back, like it does every time some new bloke is runnin' it. They laid thousands o' old navy men off; even me. I thought I could serve my country this way, lad; but I see I'm in a service that don't reckon no country at all. Well, boy, like I was comin' to say, Master Perry's kind o' in your debt, an' Alec Drake is proud to pay the debt for him. It's why I mentioned this hull matter."

"You must rate me in danger."

"Packs o' it; you an' Nott. Y' see, you're in the middle. We don't know which way you'd jump was there trouble. You shipped from that backwash town what'll take its profit anywhere it can get it regardless, an' you're under the wings o' the quarterdeck, so to speak. But like I say, I'll speak with me mates for'ard. They need you—an' you need them, I'd say; but they got to be all-fired sure o' you both before they even broach the matter to you. An' lad, you better stay aft till you're invited for'ard. Some has got notions you might be spyin', an' I ain't sayin' there ain't hotheads amidst us."

"I got to go for'ard to get at the carpenter's stores."

"Damn seldom, you do, the work Tinker makes for carpenter rates. It makes some o' the hands feel mebbe you wasn't shipped for carpenterin'. Well, you do have to come for'ard, step open an' don't get caught listenin'."

"You better tell me the plan."

"Oh, no; that I won't."

"Mutiny?"

"I ain't sayin'. Boy, even now you could have me keelhauled by jest whisperin' the word aft."

"Rest easy," Chid said, "I won't tattle. If there's trouble comin', I want to be where there's the least of it."

Drake shuffled off, stoop-shouldered and old-looking. Chid remained for a long time in the gently moving shadows of the shrouds where Drake had left him. There was much to think out. Chid believed Drake, with his queer warped notion of paying a debt. His voice had been sincere, and his thoughts hardly cunning. And the situation was

beginning to make a pattern. Chid could fit in the parts somewhat and make reason of them.

He thought that he could detect in the pattern that Fish and the officers wanted him and Nez on their side. It explained the return of the eighty dollars by Fish. That money had come out of his own pocket to keep his good will and to make him suspicious of Drake's men. And there was Tinker's jettisoning of the pistols which Reefer had looted from the prize. Chid, thinking about it, reasoned that Fish must be on the alert and fearful of having arms of any kind outside of the armory, the key for which he himself kept always.

He had not the least doubt of what Drake's mates planned. It was mutiny, or whatever a man chose to call it, and they waited only for a reasonable chance of success to take the *Blessed Cause* from their murdering officers and sail her into some port, there to tell their story to the Prize Court. Chid had small doubt but that they would be believed, for the story was easily proved. And privateers turned pirate were not uncommon. Chid knew of one such out of Nantucket, and he'd heard of others.

The mutineers, too, wanted him and Nez. If they would have them, Chid considered it smart to join them. It wasn't a moral issue with him; not particularly so, anyway. His money was forward, removed there from the clutches of Lefferts. To have free access to it was the obviously smart thing to work for.

He put it up to Nez, in whispers, before turning in. Nez was amazed and said so, scratching his head ruefully. "If they was on'y things 'stead o' people," he grumbled. "I wouldn't have no trouble understandin' them. I don't never have no trouble understandin' things, Chid."

"Things stay put," Chid agreed. "You can count on them. People don't. They say one thing and mean another, and they'd knife you all the while smiling like a parson come to dinner."

"Me an' Antwine could do some chip-splittin' on Fish an' them an' mebbe end it."

"I reckon that would be called plain murder ashore. Anyway, the real power aft is Lefferts. He's got the weapons, handy as a wheel becket."

"What do you reckon we ought to do, Chid?"

"I don't think it's time to say yet," Chid said, feeling proud that Nez, usually so self-sufficient and able, had asked him. "I'm fair sick of this

voyage, and I'd as lief quit as not if I could. But I don't figure to lose my profits; or yours either. Someway, we got to get our money aft under our own eyes again and keep it there."

"You got any ideas how?"

"Nope. That coin must weigh a hundred-weight; we can't just hide it in our pockets. I'd make a move to join them forward, they'd let me. Trouble is, Nez, it seems they ain't got a chance of winning. Fish is onto them, I'll lay. Even with us they like couldn't count on more than half the hands; say twenty against twenty-two or so. But the twenty have the weapons, Nez. 'Course, a man on the winning side might come in for a right good share of additional prize money when noses are counted after a scrap. But I allow he'd mebbe have trouble hanging onto it, was he with Fish's party."

"Chid, you wouldn't figure like that, would you?"

"Well, no. Not deliberate. But a man's got to look at all sides of a question; he kind of owes it to himself. I suppose if we went aft and told the captain, he'd take us with him quick."

"They'd cut Alec Drake to ribbons on the triangle."

"I know," Chid admitted. "I wouldn't want that on my head, profit or no profit, Nez. I think we ought to stay in the middle till we have to jump."

"You're a funny feller, Chid," Nez said, not smiling. "You ain't all bad, but you ain't all good either; just on a eternal steelyard ready to gallop to the tipped end whichever. It comes from bein' raised in civilization, where you're surrounded by people 'stead o' things. It makes you onreliable, like them. You take us Notts, Chid. We all growed up deep in the hills. Ol' Gramp Nott, who was a hundert an' still head o' the fambly, had Indians an' Tories an' raggies an' Jason knows what in camp. All he asked was a man be steady like the bresh an' sky an' crags which surrounded us. An' a man was; he couldn't help it because his roots, so to speak, pretty soon tuk holt o' plain oncomplicated things what didn't change an' go gaddin' 'round creation gettin' involved. I don't mebbe tell it so good, Chid, but I feel it, an' that ought to signify. The p'int is, a man ought to make up his mind. It ain't never comfortable on the nub o' a steelyard. It's much better in the pan; either side. I reckon, Chid,

you don't know which way to jump 'cause you don't know what you want."

"I know what I want," Chid said. "Right now it's to save my neck an' my money."

"No, it ain't either," Nez said positively. "That's on'y part o' it. What you really want is to save yourself. Chid Alwyn has you plumb confounded, Chid. Part o' him is you, an' part is what folks an' their tarnal doin' an' sayin' made him into. Some place in the mess things is in, you can find Chid Alwyn. It don't matter which side your money is on or which side has the most guns."

"How about you?"

"Why, I'm with Drake an' Antwine, o' course," Nez said promptly. "Them fellers is friends an' damn' good ones. You can have my cussed money, jest to prove it ain't that."

"I don't want your money."

"Neither do I. It ain't what I signed on for. Chid, you better make up your mind about this."

"If I had our money right here with me, I could see clearer," Chid said. "Right now, you and I are the balance of power. I don't reckon anything will happen till they settle about us for'ard."

"With them, win or loose, you'd have a clean bill with the gov'mint, Chid."

"A-yep, I been considering. Trouble is the court and the owners and the lawyer people and the rest would bite fearful into our prize money, sayin' we got in all right."

"Let 'em," Nez said. "You'd be alive for packs o' sport an' doin's yet. That's somethin', Chid."

Chid allowed it was, not wanting to continue the troubling argument.

In some ways, Nez was right. But he was very wrong about that steel-yard with Chid on the nub. The real foundation went beyond the steel-yard, to the thing from which the steelyard hung; and Chid reckoned he was pretty decided and steady about that. It was his dreams and his hopes and his ambitions, and these other things were but means, to be used or ignored, as he saw fit. He did not have to decide for either side of the steelyard; not this present one, anyway. Both sides might be valueless to him in relation to what he was really striving for.

Chid saw that he had been thinking along obvious lines, trying to get in step with the plans of others. Trouble was, both sides were dangerous and, for Chid, wrong.

Drake and his friends, whatever their motives, whether fear or honesty, hadn't a chance. They did not even have, as they seemed to believe, the weapon of surprise in their meager war bag. Lefferts's marines could quell any uprising in minutes. Chid couldn't believe that the crew's plans were brilliant or even carefully charted.

Fish's plans had been crafty. It would suit him perfectly to be rid of all but enough to work his ship to escape to limbo, then find their prize money and redivide it. It had been cute, distributing the money, lulling the hands into security, for it made them all, in a sense, fellows to the piratical captures. It was all hard to believe possible, but Chid had the evidence before him. Oddly, he was not much surprised. The whole situation proved again what he had seen back on the Continent—that war was a time of opportunity for smart men. Only the method surprised him. It had never occurred to him that men could be so cruel and wanton and false, not even for selfish gainful purposes.

He could, strangely, view the situation impersonally. He could feel active hatred only for Lefferts, and that was based purely on suspicion and instinctive dislike. Lefferts had not hurt him directly. But he knew that some day he would have to face the marine captain. That matter of Nez's assignment still hung between them. It had been made because he had shuffled Nez's boots around, and he was responsible for protecting Nez's prize money.

He could see now why Lefferts had made no effort to collect the sum or deduct it from the prize money as it was handed to his debtors. Lefferts knew that he would some day get it without asking for it. The final reckoning would be made between himself and Fish, and Chid had no doubt that the agreements gave him far more of the lay than he had verbally agreed to. In the situation, Chid saw the solution of one of the problems confronting him as he became aware of the plan which was slowly presenting itself to him.

Long into the sultry, restless night, Chid tossed in his berth. The *Blessed Cause* creaked and groaned in the roll. Her gear slatted aloft in

the windless air to the wails of the complaining blocks and cordage, and the foul bilge smells, warm and strong, pervaded the hot steerage. Lefferts, for a reason that Chid could now surmise, still slept aft. Drake and his bunkmates snored in nerve-racking disharmony about him, and Nez, still fearing the seasickness, chumped his quid wetly and noisily in his sleep.

There was, Chid made himself understand toward morning, only one smart thing to do: play a lone hand founded upon plans which were his own and could not go wrong. But he saw, reaching a decision at last, that for a while at least his course must lie parallel to the course of Drake and his friends. At all costs he must be accepted by them. In no other way would he have free access to the carpenter's stores in the bow and his hidden money. Almost two thousand dollars in coin was not a sum to be concealed in a breck's pocket. A bit at a time, requiring many trips, it must be smuggled out. Nobody forward or aft must be allowed the smallest suspicion that a third plot existed.

For Chid had decided that his best course, which meant the safest and most profitable one, was to make his escape from the *Blessed Cause*. Looking at it Nez's way, he was still on the nub of the steelyard. And he reckoned it was the real Chid Alwyn that was there. A man, he guessed, couldn't be in a better place, no sir, not and come out with a whole skin and what he had started out for.

Chapter Six

It did not strike Chid as particularly odd when Mr. Bolt the following morning ordered him to sheathe the opening which gave forward from the steerage into the midship hold and the forecabin. He recognized the barricade as a good protection from a below-deck attack from forward.

Now that he was alert to what was breeding, he could see many additional signs of intrigue about him. He had, apparently, been hopelessly dull not to have perceived them before. Seemingly, this brewing revolt was no news to the officers; they expected trouble and were preparing for it. Nez and Antoine, at the crack of dawn, had skidded the water butt aft to the break of the poop under Lefferts's own eyes. It was an old trick; control the water butt and you control the ship. Nez had heard Lefferts mention it in just those words to Bolt when the job was finished.

It was shocking to Chid, remembering those pleasant evening hours with his mates and the convincing kindness of Tinker, to find that behind it these desperate plans had been forming. Chid could not know the details of the captain's earlier efforts to sway the hands to free-booting. It had all been done quietly and under cover, and the little birdlike man, working through his officers and that part of the crew which he had managed to gather to him by his own devious devices, had never actually proposed anything irregular. He had weeded and tested, and when he had achieved a majority in favor, he had boldly proceeded with his plans. Almost before the hands had realized it, his trap had been sprung; each had been given a share of the prize money so temptingly displayed and was enmeshed.

Chid had guessed Fish's strength—Lefferts's armed pacing marines, rowdy bruisers parading in military uniforms. He could find no strength on the side of Drake's band. They were simple men, not used to intrigue

or very much forethought, and their arms were nothing but right and truth and decency; mighty poor weapons against serpentine powder and cold steel and cunning, long-prepared plans. He felt sorry for them—and curiously glad that he himself would not be dependent upon their success for his own escape from the black conspiracy rumbling about him. He needed them but for a very short time, and for but one thing.

Chid cut the boards from some fitch-sawn pine dunnage which he found atop the beach-rubble ballast. He boarded the forward side of the narrow opening horizontally, then spiked a vertical sheathing on the after-side, making a solid bulkhead almost four inches thick. It looked strong. But Chid, or any man knowing about it, could smash it down with a hand hook plied from the forward side in two minutes. The anchoring fastenings were into a set of false jambs, overlooked by Mr. Bolt, who, when Chid had finished, pronounced the barricade secure.

Chid was glad the second mate hadn't taken the inspection as an opportunity to sound him out, using the purpose of the barricade as an excuse. It proved that he and Nez were considered of the captain's party, an important matter if his plans for escape were to succeed.

During the morning Chid had a chance to check the position of the *Blessed Cause*. He had been French-polishing the captain's writing case, smoothing it with pumice and then applying a new-fangled oil said to be extracted from the earth near Pittsburgh, in Pennsylvania. The sailing track, marked with a quill scratch on the battered hand-drawn ocean chart, showed the schooner approaching the end of her westerly board; not too far away from the Capes of the Delaware but that a small boat under oars and sail could make it handily. Chid rubbed the case, feeling a warm satisfaction as he always did when wood grew useful or beautiful under his hands, impressing the details of the chart upon his mind. He would rather have had Nez see it; he himself was not much of a sailor and knew almost nothing of navigation.

When Chid was able to tell him, Nez was for the escape, rising to immediate enthusiasm. "It'll be more adventure'n I see so far on this trip; even with a scrap comin'. All that way in a mite o' a boat an' stole, too! No more seasickness for Gramp Nott's fav'rite. But, Chid, you recollect what I told you. I jumped. I'm with Drake's boys."

"They haven't asked you, have they?"

"No. But that don't bile no sap, Chid. Alec an' Antwine, too, would ask if their mates 'ud let 'em an' that's what counts. We got to take them two with us. Otherwise, I ain't for it."

"I'll go, if it's alone. But we can take them. Don't you mention it till we're ready, though. First, we get the money aft; then we invite. Nez, we got to head west of north, about two hundred miles; you better lift a boat compass some place."

"Shucks a'mighty! We don't need no compass. When you're homin', there's on'y one course on the North Atlantic. You got to stay sober enough to make out which is sunset an' which is sunrise; then you head into the sunset till you raise a large chunk o' continent. That's Ameriky. It works every time, Chid."

"Well, it better for us. I got the money wrapped in small packets, all tucked back in the oakum cask. They were watching me pretty close; and I reckon, like Alec says, some of 'em don't like us prowling about forward. Whenever you got a good reasonable excuse to go to the storeroom, you better sneak a packet aft. We'll get it into the boat at night."

"Which boat you figurin' on, Chid?"

"There's two. You pick one, Nez."

Nez decided for the stern boat at once. It was a heavy launch, with sailing gear lashed to the thwarts, and it hung over the stern from wooden horns which were extensions of the oak rail caps. The captain's boat rested on skids in the waist and would need man-power and time to swing her over the rail and outboard. Chid was satisfied with the easily launched stern boat. His regular duties saw the boat's water cask filled, and he could easily lift the stores necessary for a two- or three-day trip.

"All's might stop us is the helmsman, Nez. We'll go at night; but we'll have to settle him."

"Well," Nez said, "I can th'ow my knife good in the dark if I got to. But first, I'll give him a chance to come along."

Chid went to calking an open covering board over the officers' cabins. He worked slowly, bare-shouldered, letting the sun beat on him, and he was careful not to keep his oakum sack too full. He thus had plausible and visible reason to visit the storeroom and managed to do so three times. Each time, concealed in the oakum wad, he brought a small coin packet aft. These he tumbled into his shirt and, just before noon, took

the shirt to the steerage and transferred the money to his berth. It wasn't the safest place, but it was all he could think of.

The schooner rolled lazily, making less than two knots. Far off on the lee beam a pod of whales sported on the calm sea, and to the eastward the fog still hung like a fluff of white cotton wadding. Preserved Fish came on deck and stripped, then had one of the watch draw sea water and slosh it over his thin body. The standing rigging was slack, and under the rails it was airless and scorching. It was hard to believe that it was only February and that in New England, not so far northward, the snow and ice still covered the land and would for a long time.

Drake made no move toward him. Once, when he was forward, Chid definitely felt the hostility of which the gunner had warned. Griswold had dogged his footsteps and lounged purposefully on a rope coil while he rummaged in the carpenter stores. Chid hadn't been able to take a packet that time. He made it his business to stay aft for a while. At all costs the way to the storeroom must be kept open. But he managed, during the afternoon watch, to steal some salt meat and biscuits, keeping the cook busy the while by asking him to prepare the hot reefing hooks which he needed to clean the pitch out of the seams which he was re-calking.

A marine loafed near the water butt always. Watching, Chid could almost reckon the division of the crew. Drake's mates came aft to the butt with a hesitant shuffle, like men testing new pond ice, eying the marine with distrust, then drinking hastily. The captain's men came with swagger and stayed long to relish the drink. But nothing happened all the long warm afternoon. Mr. Tinker stood his watch lazily, sitting on the weather rail with his feet hooked behind a carvel for steadiness. The look-out reported a ship once, hull down and leagues down alee; nothing to bother. Both forward and aft, though, Chid, now sensitive to small signs, could detect a tense waiting silence, potent but not yet ominous. Drake, without pattern, circulated among the dozing men on the foredeck but never once looked Chid's way. Chid could guess that the morning's work on the barricade was being counted against him.

He wished that, without being noticed, he could show Drake the weakness in the barricade. It would help Drake's arguments and show his own sympathies. He couldn't blame them for hesitating. They had to be sure

of himself and Nez before broaching the matter in any way. And carpenters, by tradition, were undeclared enemies of seamen. He and Nez berthed in the quasi-officialdom of the steerage and had upon them the stamp of approval of the quarterdeck by reason of having replaced four loyal men.

Nez finished setting up the cedar wedges between the deck planking and the after-timber heads, almost a daily chore since the hot drying weather, then came to sit with Chid.

"That boat's all right," he said, studying the softly rustling idle canvas. "She's tight an' all her gear's in her. I snuck a look-see whilst wedgin'."

"Good. I reckon we better get that money aft fast's we can now an' get off tomorrow night before we wear east'ard again. Griswold and those fellers for'ard were eying me awful suspicious. I wouldn't want to chance any more trips today."

"I hear'n Tinker say he looks for wind come night, from the east; an' if it comes he'll claw off the land right away. Chid, we better get off tonight."

"I'm not leaving without my money, Nez."

"I got one packet aft."

"You were for'ard more times than that."

"Well, yes. But I kinda forgot some o' the other times. Tarnation, Chid, do we have to bother so with that damned money? This is a simple matter o' gettin' away from where we don't want to be; easy's walkin' out o' a prayer meetin' you didn't make it so danged complicated."

"I can't help circumstances, Nez. All I can do is to try and lick 'em. But we can't go tonight; not unless I do something I don't want to do."

"What's that?"

"Why, show Drake and his boys where I stand; prove it and stop the arguing against us. They'd let us for'ard then anytime. Did you ask Antoine and Drake to come, Nez?"

"On'y Antwine, Chid. I don't want to lose track o' that bucko. Me an' him's goin' trappin' up in his Big Otter some day. He plumb loves that place, Chid, an' he says he was a goddamn' fool to heed them recruiters what drug him down to salt. Chid, Antwine jined with the notion he was to help this here war. Ain't it funny the way so many o' these hands had that notion? You an' me never give it a thought, Chid."

"I did. But it didn't fool me any."

"Well, I didn't. I figured 'twould be fun an' that there Mister Lidbody was crowdin' me with the law for lickin' o' him to hunker up some on the way he used the Crowns. But, Chid, there must be suthin' to it; fightin' jest because you reckon the nation needs you. Dang it, times I can almost kind o' feel it; like suthin' was actual sayin', 'Nez Nott, damn your sportin' soul, they's more to livin' than funnin' an' grabbin' onto rum an' jollification wherever! But, damned if I know what 'tis, Chid. Do you?"

"Not exactly, Nez. But I don't reckon it's a natural thing. You got to ferment it up with fife music and liquor and flag-waving and such; and bounties. Good Lord, Nez, if the gov'mint starved your family for years and drove you into debt and then came around and said they'll get you out of it and make you a handsome cash gift to come and fight for three months, you'd like to do it, were you caught like that. It's about all a man could do, but he likes to name it patriotism to himself and his neighbors."

"I ain't so sure," Nez said. "You see some awful dumb bastards in the militia and the Navy, but once in a time you run up against a feller like Drake, or that Perry feller, or even Antwine. There's suthin' good about them fellers; I'd admire to know what 'tis."

"They just got to make excuses to themselves for what plain-seeing men do right out."

"No, it ain't that," Nez said. "Plain-seein' men don't even see what they see, I reckon. It ain't money, nor sport neither. Gramp Nott would have knowed what 'twas. He mayn't ha' named it, but he'd respect it. Chid, what makes you so bitter?"

"I'm not bitter. I'm just hankering for what every man's got a right to hanker for, and I'm doing something about it. The gov'mint won't, the Army won't, nobody won't save myself. Nez, you're getting on the nub of a steelyard yourself."

"Not the nub, Chid, the pan; but I ain't too stubborn to shift pans if it so be I discovered I was in the wrong one."

"Well," said Chid, feeling vaguely disturbed and curiously resentful, "is Antoine coming or not?"

"Yes; he's comin', whenever we give the word."

It suited Chid. He liked the French-Canadian and his simple straight-

forwardness. He liked Drake, too, but in a different way. He felt a sharp sympathy for him. He had laid something noble and good on the altar of his ideals when he signed on the *Blessed Cause*, and it must have been shocking to him to discover the depths of the deception. Like Nez, Chid could not completely understand men like Drake.

Nez's news was disconcerting. The fog bank was much closer now, though there was still no appreciable wind. At her present rate of sailing, which Chid hoped would remain the same for another day at least, the *Blessed Cause* would be within small-boat sailing distance of the coast. He watched the fog with concern, trying to find in it signs of a breeze strong enough to make Fish put away from the lee shore. But he knew little of these signs of the sea, and realized that he had to wait upon sailing orders for reliable guidance. And that might be too late.

Chid kept himself conspicuous and easy for Drake to find. Mr. Bolt had the deck. He paced the port side, in imitation of Fish, giving superfluous instructions to the helmsman in a profound voice. Lefferts was below preparing himself for the nightly inspection of the ship, a solemn ritual with him. He appeared each day at this time, always in full dress uniform, dress sword at his side, varnished boots on his feet, and white cotton gloves drawn over his stubby fat hands.

Chid figured that he had ten minutes. If Drake did not seek him out before, he'd have to force the issue and leave no doubt as to which side he was loyal to. For, as the sun sank into the low horizon haze, the breeze picked up with a faint but portentous force. The lazy booming of the slack canvas ceased, and the silky ripple of the reef points quieted; small dark cat's-paws scurried over the sea and vanished, and under the bow a small wave was slowly but steadily building. Chid knew that if he was to make his escape at all, it would have to be tonight.

But at last Drake detached himself from his mates and came shuffling to him, his long sad face set and grim.

"I done the best I could, boy," he said. "The lads was listenin' like schoolboys till you barricaded that door aft. They don't even like what Nez did, an' you both been for'ard too much to suit 'em."

"But you still need us, don't you?"

"Some, but not so much. You was to supply 'em with carpenter tools for fightin' till we got the armory open. But Reefer, he found a way to

get into the storeroom without your key. They figure you ain't worth askin' now, not an' run the risk o' Fish knowin'."

"He does know."

"Mebbe. But he don't know when."

"When?"

"I wouldn't say, boy. When is the only real weapon we got. It's up to you now. I done all I could to pay back what Master Perry owes you. I reckon I failed; which you might say ain't novel for Alexander Drake."

"I been figuring," Chid said, having to say it at last, "to make you a good sign where we stand."

"How?"

"I know how. You want it?"

"Not me, lad. But me mates, I guess they got to have it."

"All right," said Chid, "I'll make it."

"Mind it," Drake suddenly whispered. "Inspection's comin'."

"A-yep. I know it."

He slid to his feet from the rail. Lefferts and Mr. Tinker, paced by two marines turned out to a gouty admiral's fancy, were moving slowly forward through the vessel. Tinker was genial and talkative, pleasantly pointing out the small evening chores to be done. Lefferts was sharp-eyed and alert, and he seemed extraordinarily suspicious tonight as he poked into corners with his whale-bone dress cane.

Like Chid, the hands all stood at attention, singly and in small groups. Nez and Antoine ceased their endless game of split the chip. Three bells sounded, like a cracked porcelain bowl being struck, for Fish had long ago had the clapper muffled against sound carrying. From aloft, above the empty crosstree barrels, the look-out hailed softly, "All's well aloft, sir!" To Chid it seemed as if all time and motion had ceased to watch him make his sign.

He licked his lips, suddenly gone dry and hard. Lefferts paced slowly toward him, not hiding his scowling dislike. Chid kept his eyes inboard and unmoving, but he spoke loudly and clearly, his hands clenched.

"Permission to speak, sir."

"At mast, damn your impudence!" Lefferts growled.

"Now," Chid said firmly.

"Hear him." Tinker smiled, stopping the captain. "Alwyn's a promising lad."

Chid fought for steadiness, driving down the sudden feeling of panic. "I'd like to see Nez Nott's assignment," he said. "I been hearing how you cheat fellers such as him, and I reckon it's time I checked."

"Eh? Tinker, am I hearin' correct?"

"A-yep; damn right you are," Chid said. "This is a matter between you and Nott, and I'm taking over Nott's side. You knew he couldn't read; so I'll read for him. I want to see that writing. If it's like you told him it was, I'll pay you now. If it ain't you won't get paid at all. I don't want no truck with cheats and conniving bastards."

"Jesus Christ, boy!" Drake breathed.

Chid hadn't known what he was going to say; not the exact words. He knew instantly that he had been clumsy; that anger and hatred had flooded into his words. But it made no real difference. He was showing exactly where he stood with the quarterdeck. He stood glaring at Lefferts, feeling the man's hatred, watching the pudgy white hand creep to the sword handle. "Easy, cap'n," Tinker whispered, suddenly grim, "easy does it. We ain't ready for trouble this minute."

Lefferts nodded sullenly, understanding. He could not risk letting this encounter become the match to the fuse which led to that smoldering trouble forward. He fought down his anger, the blood rushing suddenly into his pasty face, and showed Chid a broad tolerant grin, only the small pig eyes showing craftily from their lairs behind the fat cheek flesh.

"The lad's sick. Mr. Tinker, this poor boy's ravin' sick," Lefferts said loudly. "Damme, he's witless with it. Aft to the captain with him, I say; he needs medicine bad, I d'clare."

"No you don't," Chid cried. "There's nothing wrong with me. This is man to man. Where's the writing?"

"Writing?" Lefferts said with heavy patience. "Why, there ain't no writing. Mr. Nott don't owe me a farthing; not a damned farthing. Tinker, let my boys help the poor sick lad."

"Aye," Tinker agreed, "the captain'll mend your ailments, Chid. You got some sun, boy. Come on, lad."

Chid was completely baffled. He stood before them, looking as sick as they said he was, feeling the hot shame of his defeat creep over him. All

he had wanted was a good hot argument, man to man with Lefferts; to damn him and say what he could to show that he wasn't one of the captain's men. But they had totally foiled him.

He tried desperately to think, to find something to clutch upon to save himself. Once aft, Lefferts's revenge would be savage and complete. But he could find nothing. Two marines moved to his side, guns at present, the solid walnut butts threatening. Drake stood riveted to the deck, a queer trembling at his mouth. Tinker seized Chid's arms, offering support. "Don't be a damn fool," Tinker snarled close to Chid's ear. "Come peaceable . . . all hell's ready to slop over, an' you ain't goin' to start it."

And then Chid saw a hope, a desperate, dangerous chance. He could start the mutiny. He held the key to it in his two fists. Drake would act; so would Nez. Others would follow. It was a long chance. But the after-guard was disorganized and separated, the barrels unmanned; Fish, and now Bolt, too, were below and unaware of the situation on deck. The only strong weapon of the mutineers, which was surprise, was suddenly available to them, and Chid could place the weapon in their hands.

Chid took two docile steps to clear his brain; to kill time. The men stood exactly as he had seen them but two minutes ago, waiting for inspection. But there was something changed about them, too. That silent waiting tenseness had suddenly become dangerous. Chid could feel it; in Alec Drake's sad eyes, now suddenly sharp and cunning, he could see it.

Chid swung; both arms arced backwards, striking back-handed blows on the faces of the two marines flanking him. They closed immediately, gun butts ramming upwards viciously. Chid stepped suddenly backward. He heard the two marines collide; the sharp scream of one of them. He butted Lefferts savagely with his lowered head, hitting him in the stomach exactly where his white leather shoulder belts made a cross over the scarlet jacket. And then two steely hands were at Chid's throat, the fingers feeling for the hold of strangulation, and Tinker was on his back. Chid punched blindly, trying to put strength and accuracy into the backward blows. The mate's legs closed around Chid's middle, the feet locked, and they rolled over and over on the deck.

Lefferts was shouting orders. From some place aft issued musket fire. Drake was shouting, leaping into the close confused mêlée with a belaying pin swinging. Antoine's terrible ax flashed forward and, above the horrible

gurgling in his head, Chid could hear the gleeful whoops of Nez Nott near by. Tinker snarled and clung to him like a forest cat, but the awful stabbing pressure at Chid's throat did not relax. He shook Tinker from his back, bucking like a mule, and dealt him close hard body blows; but the hands at his throat would not let go.

A pistol cracked from the quarterdeck, and a man clutched his belly and puked. Forward there was noisy hand-to-hand fighting, stabbed by savage cursing and screams, and from a stand of marines at the water butt came irregular spitting musket fire. Chid heard it as if from another far-away world. His mind was darkening, his strength ebbing. But he still tumbled and rolled, lashing like a snake in a crotch trap, trying to shake off those pressing fingers.

And then suddenly the terrific hurt stopped, and clear sharp air burst into his burning lungs. Blood fell on him in warm, disgusting gushes, and Tinker's body became heavy on his. Chid pushed it away in frantic horror, recoiling from the soft lifelessness of it. And he saw, as the mate's body slid to the waterways, that a bone-handled knife projected from the forehead, exactly between the eyes.

Chid lay beside the dead mate, unable to move, gasping for breath. A foot trod on him, hurting him, but he was powerless to move from under it. Men fought all around him. Lead whistled overhead. The pistol still popped from the quarterdeck. From far aloft came a thin cry, "Sail O!"

"You all right, Chid?"

Chid could only nod to Nez and lie still. The knife was gone from Tinker's forehead, and it flashed again in Nez's swinging right hand, keeping the sweating bodies away from Chid. Drake crept on his belly, a long saber gash from his ear to his jaw point flowing hot blood. But he stabbed with almost detached concentration at the moving figures with a cruel steel gun screw.

"Sail O! Ahoy, the deck!"

But no acknowledgment came from the deck; only the panting and cursing of fighting, angry, hurt men.

A man came at Chid, swinging a hickory capstan bar. Chid lashed to his belly, taking the stinging blow on the rump; then, feeling a curious lust for personal revenge, tackled the man's knees. Chid stayed inside the swinging bar, brought the man to his back on the deck, and bit the hand

until the bar dropped from it. Grasping it, he swung it savagely from a kneeling position. He felt the bar mush into the man's face, like bashing in a dozy melon.

"Ahoy, the deck! It's that damned Yankee brig as spoke us. Come outen the fog bank sudden, an' she's close aboard an' hailin'."

Chid could tell nothing of the battle's swing. The *Blessed Cause* sailed on, her wheel in a becket. Through a freeing port from which he breathed sweet chilling air, he could see the man-o'-war. She sailed with purpose, paralleling their own course; and as he watched a gun spat red fire and a ball whirred across the bow. It was almost dark. Suddenly Chid was thinking clearly again.

He crept forward, avoiding the fighting groups. At the forepeak hatch, Chid obligingly tripped a man for Griswold, saw with satisfaction that Griswold swung his bloody saber at the prone figure. He dropped quickly below.

The storeroom had been broken open, and the heavy tools were gone from their pegs. But the oakum cask was undisturbed. Chid threw the oakum out, then dragged the cask aft. At the barricade door, he hacked at the few fastenings with a hand hook. The panel fell forward. In the steerage, where he had full headroom, he lifted the coin-heavy keg, placing it at the foot of the after-companion ladder. Then he crept to the deck.

Captain Fish crouched in the protection of the trunk house. He was aiming his pistol. Mr. Bolt lay beside him, cursing and clutching a wadded jacket to a spreading red spot in his middle. The body of a marine lay across the water butt. Fish's gun cracked. Off in the gloom Chid could hear the rush of a ship sailing close aboard.

"I managed to get aft to help, sir," Chid said.

"Good," Fish said coldly. "Keep me a pistol loaded, boy. Where's that damned Lefferts?"

"Ain't seen him. Give me your powder horn, sir."

Fish bent, unfastening his belt pouch. Chid took the pistol by the warm barrel, raised it, then cracked it smartly on the captain's head. Fish crumpled with a tired sigh. Mr. Bolt moaned and lay against the wheel stanchion. In his left hand was clutched a curiously curved dagger.

The boat still hung on the stern horns. Calmly Chid brought up the cask and tumbled it into the boat. Then he went to his berth in the

steerage. But the packets which he had hidden there were gone. Two hundred dollars. Chid swore. He put the provisions in the boat. His head ached horribly. He could feel a hot burning in his throat as if Tinker's fingers had come away from his body and were still pressed deeply into the flesh.

He crept forward once more, below decks. The man-o'-war's gun boomed again, muted by the hull. He had no taste to be on hand when the *Blessed Cause* was finally brought up. Law and the government would be on the navy ship, inquiries and trouble; things which would cut into his dreams and his money and his time.

Nez wriggled his way to the shadow of the rail when Chid called him from the hatchway. "Chid, I thought you was a goner."

"The boat's ready. Where's Drake?"

"He's kilt, Chid."

"Antoine?"

"Right here with me. He's cut bad."

Men still fought and tumbled. It seemed to Chid that they had been fighting so for hours, but it was less than ten minutes ago that he had started this bloody fray. Nez and Antoine came silently down the ladder. Antoine chanted a curse in French, over and over through gritted teeth, and he twisted a rope end around his thigh, above the spongy, sopping red stain in his breeks. They were at the steerage door when a full broadside from the brig crashed into the schooner. It was navy fire, uniformly fired and heavy metal, and from frightfully close. Chid could hear the tortured timber and plank tear asunder under the iron rain.

"You count twenty between 'em," Nez said. "That's the time a man's got to move."

They crouched in the passage, waiting for the next broadside. It was higher, aimed at rigging and spars, but a solid shot tore into the steerage, only inches above Chid's own berth, showering them with splinters. They stumbled up the ladder. Amidships a heavy lower yard crashed to the deck, covering the midship with slowly collapsing canvas, like a great shroud.

"All right now," Chid cried. "Into the boat."

Fish was a small unmoving bundle on the deck. Mr. Bolt sagged against the stanchion, breathing with a gurgling sound. In the waist somebody

yelled, "Surrender, surrender," in a feeble, almost childish whine. The sea was dark and wind-ruffled, just commencing to roll. Nez dashed to the starboard falls. Chid went to larboard, knife ready to cut away. There was still time, and the sea and the night were dark . . .

"Nez!"

"I notice, Chid. Christ!"

"The boat's gone. Nez, she's gone!"

He looked into the darkness astern in numbing disbelief. The falls swayed crazily overside, the shattered wreckage of the bow and stern breast hooks still hanging from them.

"Shot away. . . . Nez, the money's gone, too. Come on, the other boat. Maybe we can . . ."

"Hell," Nez said quietly. "Chid, there ain't no other boat. Lefferts got away in her." Then he climbed to the trunk top and stood tall and straight, waving his arms above his head. "Surrender," Nez hailed. "Surrender!"

"Is good," Antoine murmured. "Nez, is good, dat."

Chapter Seven

THE BRIG WHICH swung her grappling hooks into the lower rigging of the *Blessed Cause* was the United States sloop of war *Adder*, Captain Josiah Farlow, on patrol and merchant ship protection. She had left New York after a violent gale and snowstorm which had at last brought real winter to the Hudson Valley. She had spoken a bold Salem privateer, the *Diligence*, one calm evening, then cruised northward to look into a British 44 which the privateer had reported in the neighborhood. She had seen nothing of the enemy ship but had sighted some wreckage which Captain Farlow thought rather confirmed her proximity.

It was almost dark when the bow lookout reported the wreckage, seemingly of a small coastal vessel, and fog was beginning to roll in from the eastward. It was not until the brig was close aboard the tangled mass of gear and deck furniture that the sailing master discovered a black man clinging to a stove-in yawl boat some yards away. He hove to at once and put the quarter boat over and brought the poor fellow on board. The black's tale, when he was able to speak coherently, brought Captain Farlow himself to the man's pallet in the forecabin.

Farlow was young, like the Navy itself, just getting accustomed to the dignity and responsibility of command. But he was no fool. The black's story and the man's horror-ridden eyes were convincing. Farlow agreed with him that the vessel which had attacked the Jamaican was a pirate. Every sign pointed to it... the cautious cowardly attack itself, the quick disposition of the prize, and the attempt to murder the crew to the last man. But the man's description of the vessel puzzled him for a long time. It fitted exactly the description of the *Diligence*. She had seemed an orderly and well-managed ship, making the proper identification, as he had watched while his officer of the deck had spoken her.

Nevertheless Farlow posted orders to keep a special lookout for her.

It was highly improbable that a Salem privateer would be sailing on the account, but it was not impossible. He'd heard of several Connecticut vessels that had and one from New Jersey. He felt that there was small chance of meeting her again, but he dropped south to her latitude for a half-day, then bore west. He struck thin making-fog in the late afternoon watch the next day. Sailing with it under a freshening breeze, he suddenly ran into a clear sunset against which, less than two miles downwind, the privateer he was seeking sailed on a broad reach.

Farlow was Navy trained. He immediately cleared for action and lighted his battle lanterns, a precaution which his officers approved. A ten-gun schooner of unknown intentions and suspicious history might require more than a hail from under the United States ensign to bring her to for questioning.

The *Adder*, being to windward, had no trouble heading the black schooner. Farlow made flag signals in the usual manner, wondering at the audacity of the schooner to ignoring them and sailing on; then, with quick decision, ordered a shot across her bow.

She failed to pay any attention, even after two more warning shots were given, and at no time did she show either colors or signals. Through his glass, Farlow could make out a commotion on her decks; she was being handled in anything but a smart manner, and his topmen reported that they could hear the sound of musket fire. Farlow braced round on the wind to parallel the schooner's course, noting that the wind was getting livelier and careful to hold the weather gauge. At half-cable's length off he could see and hear her trouble. A giant hand-to-hand fight was going on.

Whatever the cause, and whatever the service of the schooner, he was entirely within his duty to interfere. The black, his eyes rolling white and his queer Oxford-English speech trembling with excitement, confirmed the vessel as the one which had attacked and killed his mates. Grimly, Captain Farlow passed the word for the port battery to open; half with solid shot and half with chain and bar into the rigging. It took but two rapid broadsides to sweep her decks and kill her drive. Then the *Adder* rigged for boarding and ran down on the crippled privateer.

Farlow stayed on his quarterdeck where he belonged, but the reports of his boarding officers gave him the picture of the bloodshed and murder

on the black schooner. First, her name was not *Diligence*, but *Blessed Cause*, and her Letter gave her port of hail as New London, in Connecticut. Her crew list showed forty-six hands signed on, of which four names had been scratched through with a quill pen; Farlow wondered why. Twenty-six remained alive, eight of them wounded. There were eleven dead and five missing. Her captain and first mate had both been knifed to death, and the second mate was horribly wounded, as if by an ax, and likely to die within the glass. The missing men were all marines, their captain among the number. The boarding party had met no resistance save from one pain-crazed wretch who had thrown an adze and had been pistoled where he lay. The rest had surrendered with hands upraised.

Farlow herded them forward of his own mainmast under heavy guard and sent his surgeon to care for the bloodiest. He called his officers and then, one by one, a half-dozen of the prisoners. It was difficult to make sense of the garbled stories they told. Some were insolent and some sullen. A tall rugged fair-haired boy named Chidsy Alwyn, unhurt, told a straightforward story, not difficult to believe. He claimed that the honest hands had revolted against their officers' career of piracy and murder. But the wounded second mate, to whom Farlow had to go himself, claimed that it had been quite the opposite. Alwyn and about half the crew had mutinied, murdered the captain's loyal hands, thrown the marines overside, then broken into the prize money and divided amongst themselves. Farlow, checking the story, sent a searching detail with flares and axes, proved the story to some extent. Not a cent, nor prize goods of any kind, were found aft. But forward, hidden in berths and sea-chests and the secret places of the vessel's frame which all sailors know, they found sums, all of approximately equal amounts, which tended to prove the mate's story.

There were many unexplained mysteries about the matter. Farlow wrote out his report, leaning toward the theory that the officers had been plotted against and overcome. Alwyn's story had been clear and plausible, but Farlow had been aware of a cold calculation in the boy's eyes as he spoke. He was, the captain considered, of a timbre above the average seaman and mentally quite capable of planning and leading a mutiny. But Farlow had no time for a long inquiry. He could merely take down essential first testimony of the serious affair as justice and his duty demanded he

should. The weather was making up for a gale again, and he could not stay lashed to the schooner for very long.

"I'm going to send you all into New York, under arrest," Farlow said. "What you have told me, and what we have seen, will become part of the official report and testimony. Your guilt or innocence is a matter for the court to decide. I am impounding all captured monies, together with your log and documents. The black will go with you as a vital witness."

"It's fair, sir," Griswold said, breaking his sullen silence. "We're honest men, caught in this damned trap, an' we ain't afeared o' no law trouble. We go in the schooner, sir?"

"Yes."

"She's holed," Griswold said. "Sevril places is makin' water from your fire, an' she's a shambles aloft, sir. It ain't hardly fair with weather comin'."

"It's all that I can do for you. But I'll give your carpenters freedom of the ship to mend and patch enough to keep you afloat. Until they start trouble. I warn them not to ... for Lieutenant Steel and his men will have orders to shoot at the first sign of it. Where are your carpenters, man?"

Griswold ducked his head at Chid. "Him," he said, "an' Nez Nott an' the Canuck. But the Canuck's hurt, sir."

Farlow had Nez brought aft to the wardroom, studying him under the swaying candle lamp for a long minute. "Well," he said finally. "Nott will do. Nott, you will make all necessary repairs on the schooner. If you need help, use your Canuck for striker. I can't spare you help. But under no circumstances is Alwyn to be given freedom of the ship. I consider the facts sufficiently damning to regard him as a ringleader and a dangerous man."

"Aye, aye, sir," Nez said, in the best of humor. "But Chid's all right, sir."

"I'm glad that you think so," Farlow said, signing his report. "Nevertheless, the order stands. Now get aboard your vessel, all of you, and remember that you are United States prisoners."

Chid could hear Nez's hammer blows in all parts of the ship, for the familiar steerage in which he was confined with Antoine, Reefer, and

Griswold was a quiet place, away from the rushing growl of the bow wave and the constant creaking of the mast heels as they worked in the steps. Most of the damage caused by the broadsides was high up, near the bulwarks, but several solid balls had hit the hull near the waterline. Nez had stoppered them as best he could. The hole at his berth was large and ragged, with long brittle yellow-pine splinters radiating from the shot hole. Fortunately it was high above the sea. Nez, on the first night of the rolling slant to New York, had battened a double patch of canvas outside it. But occasionally a storm-driven wavetop seeped through as the *Blessed Cause* swept northward in the wet easterly gale.

Chid hadn't seen Nez since. That was two days ago. He figured that New York was but a few watches distant. Reefer and Griswold had been silent, almost sullen, and not inclined to talk even when Chid tried to tutor them in making a plausible and orderly recital of their story in the trial which Chid knew would come.

"Hell," Reefer growled, "we ain't got a chanct, boy. Why tell 'em anythin'? A man might beat down mutiny or murder or piracy, but he can't beat down all three."

"We're right," Chid said. "If we're straight on our stories we'll be cleared."

"Look," Reefer said, chewing a splinter that took the place of his usual quid, "suppose we admit to mutiny, which was the on'y thing we done. All right. We're still up for piracy, ain't we? An' some on us is up for murder; niggers an' officers both, ain't we? Why'd you commence that trouble anyway?"

"I didn't," Chid said. "I just used it. I just kind of advanced the time a mite and saved you from being slaughtered. Fish knew all about your plans; you didn't have a chance except to take him by surprise."

"The lad's right," Griswold said. "He commenced at the on'y time good for us. I don't hold Chid here no grudge, I don't. It's carcumstances, wicked unnatchrel carcumstances, an' no mortal can lick me, sez I. We need Fish an' Tinker and Lefferts alive. We'd beat the tale outen 'em, I swear to God. we would!"

"Bolt, too," Reefer said.

"He's alive; leaswise the doc sez he'd save him. What we need is him dead. But mostly we need that money aft which Lefferts swiped when he

jumped ship on us all. Trouble is, they was a mutiny an' the hands have all the money, an' that's all that sticks out for to see."

Chid could obtain no comfort from them, nor, as he pondered his situation, from himself either. He himself was marked as a ringleader. If Bolt lived, he would name him as Fish's murderer, though Chid could not explain the knifing of the captain. He had never felt such black, hopeless defeat. It was different from having just his money or his dreams in danger. It was his life now, and his eternal freedom. In the dark dungeon to which his hopes and spirit had descended there seemed no foothold from which to start anew.

"I knew about a feller onct," Reefer said dully, "what got himself snagged into a mess similar to this; only mebbe not even as bad. Well, he was right; all-fired right an' 'twas so proved. On'y the feller was dead then."

"Hung?" asked Griswold quietly.

"By the blasted neck o' him," Reefer said, and Chid thought he was going to weep, his voice trembled so. "On Finnie's Wharf to Baltimore, an' the judge sez he was very sorry. I don't want to mention this thing no more."

Antoine's sunny spirit alone remained unquenched. His wound was painful and had been plastered with hot tar by the surgeon. But the Frenchman picked the hard tar off with a spike and bled the wound freely until, as he said, he got dizzy; then lashed the limb with his bloody rope end and, stretching out on the berth under Chid's, claimed he felt much better.

The rest of the hands were forward under battened hatches and an armed guard. There was no possible way to effect the organization necessary to storm the deck, a possibility with which Chid and Antoine toyed to while away the time.

On the second night the violent working of the schooner eased; and Reefer, breaking a long, morose silence, said they were getting under the lee of Sandy Hook off New York. They heard the noises of sail-shortening after a while; then the clicking of lead blocks and the prolonged squeal of the rudder tackles as the schooner lurched over to the port tack for the first time since they had left the man-o'-war. She stayed on that board

but a short time, the seas meantime quieting noticeably, then shook her sails for a long run through what Reefer named the Narrows.

The guard hailed for Antoine, demanding to know if he could do some carpentering. There was drift ice coming against them from the North River, and Nott was having trouble keeping his patches secure forward.

"Mus' have Antoine, see?" Antoine chirped brightly. "Ah come, sojer."

"Don't be a fool," Chid whispered. "You bust that cut open, you'll bleed to death."

"A-rrr, Cheed! De bear can no fight in de trap, hein? Why you no fight; wit' de brains, lak can do; you?"

"I been kicked too hard in 'em," Chid said sourly. "You show me some way to lose these troubles; I can't figure nothing."

"Shut up," Reefer growled. "There ain't no way. Ain't I been figurin' till I'm half-addled? 'Course, you're welcome to go th'ough that shot hole if it so be you can swim amidst salt ice in a black gale."

"No one can," Chid said. "Go on, Antoine. If you and Nez get a chance to spook, go ahead."

Antoine slipped through the door under the guard's cocked navy pistol. He limped to the ladder, babbling of the nice stormy night cheerily.

Chid tried to sleep, but he couldn't. His mind tumbled and turned in dizzying confusion, trying to sort and arrange the fantastic events of the last weeks and his apprehension lay on his belly like a colic. It was unbelievable that he, seeking merely what everybody else was seeking, should be caught in this strangling web. No one in the world could help him. The evidence of plundered ships and murdered men and stolen gold would outweigh any story told. There was no such thing as complete innocence, for to deny one charge was to admit to another.

The only key to the true story was Lefferts. To find him and his stolen gold would clear them. But Chid had small hopes that he and his marines had survived the gale in the tiny shingle-built captain's gig. Even supposing that they had run southwest, avoiding the worst of the storm, and made a landing it was hopeless to believe that Lefferts would permit himself to be found. Griswold had claimed that no court would convict them out of hand. There was, for most of them, a reasonable doubt. But

that he himself would be shown as the man who had killed the captain Chid had no doubt. From that damning fact there was no escape.

The schooner battered ice regularly, staggering as she bucked the larger unbroken floes. The vessel had made water, and her pumps were thumping on the deck above. But the wind held fair, and she slowly plowed a wet cold path through the ice meadows. Griswold snored in stuttering discord. Reefer wheezed heavily and from time to time cried out in his troubled sleep.

Chid had no idea of the time when the anchor was let go. The rattle of the wooden winch forward and the booming of the idled sails awakened him, and he supposed that he had slept for a long time. He lay on his bunk, listening to the crunching of the tide-borne ice against the hull and the steady chunk of the pumps. He felt, oddly, a curious refreshment. Cold night air was blowing upon him, and in some far-off place he could see a pale yellow light behind a smothering white curtain of falling snow.

Nez's canvas patch no longer covered the shot hole. Chid pulled his stocking cap over his face and crawled deeply into his one quilt. As Reefer had said, a man couldn't swim in winter-iced water.

"Chid!"

He was alert at once. The voice came from the shot hole.

"It's Nez. Sneak it, Chid; feet first, then drap."

"What to?"

"Do you always got to know, Chid? Jest drap."

He put his feet through the hole, turned on his belly; then hung by his hands. He could feel Nez's fingers guiding his legs. It was bitterly cold, and the snow swirled icily about him.

"Now, Chid. Drap!"

Chid let go his hold. He fell, fetched on something solid, then slipped and lay flat. He lay there a long time, feeling the coldness of what he was on seep through him. Nez poled noiselessly. They moved slowly, first with and then sharply across the current; away from the dark blur which was the *Blessed Cause*. The pump still throbbed noisily. Beside him lay another figure. It was Antoine, chuckling quietly, hugging himself close to the ice floe. Frigid water flooded the floe, creeping into Chid's clothing with breath-taking shock. To leeward there were misty shapes; wharves and ships, Chid reckoned.

"Stay flat or we'll capsize her," Nez whispered. "Chid, that there's New York."

"Let me pole. I'm freezin'."

"Shucks, you won't die. Rub your hide, but don't do it too rugged."

Rubbing helped some, and it stilled the chattering of his teeth. After a long while the floe grounded under a pile wharf. A soft chuffing sound filled the dark, dank space under it, and beyond where they had landed the tide whispered against a hull. Chid stepped into the water and waded ashore. The snow was almost a foot deep.

"This here's a shipyard," Nez said. "That sailin' master off the *Adder* headed for it when he see we're nigh to founderin'. He thinks I'm fixin' them holes but I ain't, and so he'll be pumping for a while yet. He's got to get on the ways quick."

About them lay the sheds and lofts of a large shipyard. The ragged heaps of edge-cuttings and the crisscross bracing of scaffolds and launching cradles and the several partly framed vessels wavered behind the driving gale, like the stark skeletons of forgotten monsters. The snow fell thick about them; far off a belfry clock struck four times, and from the hull beside the wharf the queer chuffing sound continued.

"We ain't out o' the bresh yet," Nez said. "Chid, me an' Antwine figure to leg it up into his country on the Big Otter for a spell. They'll be searchin' us out in these parts for a while."

Chid nodded. They'd have to leave the city. That was obvious. But it would be hopeless to attempt it on foot. The cold was intense and already beginning to still the wind. Chid had on only canvas breeks and an ill-fitting jacket over two cotton shirts. He still wore his stocking cap of black and Antoine's moccasins, now frozen into brittle, hurting casings. Nez and Antoine had little more, though both had wrapped themselves in long spiral strips of topsail canvas beneath their clothing.

They picked their way through the yard. Chid reckoned it was a large one, fit to build frigates and packets, and he felt an odd warmth in the familiar sights as they conjured themselves out of the storm. There was a pit-saw and a long keel on blocks, waiting for the adzes, and underfoot was the soft homy feel of wood chips deeply laid. They kept the wind on their backs for direction. But after a while the wind came from the side and then from ahead, and there was no turning to get it right because 'on

one side there was always the crunching ice of the river. Chid halted them suddenly. They were treading in new snow tracks made but a short time ago.

"They're ours," Chid said, feeling sudden despair. "Look, we're on an island, Nez. We've come clean around. This is the wharf again."

Chid was certain of it. He heard the chuffing sound again, as if one of the bony monsters snored with a long sad sigh and then blubbered in rapid wet exhalation. Then another sound came to join it, the sharp clang of iron. A dull red stain showed on the snow curtain and, watching, Chid could see a man throwing wood chunks into flame beyond a small door. The sound ceased abruptly, and the stain dulled. Antoine cursed with agitation.

"By Gar! You know what hims is? Sacre . . . we mus' spook, Gardamn, but queeck. Cheed . . . Nez; come!"

"Hell's tootin'," Nez growled. "Tain't nuthin' but a steam mill, you rabbit-gutted froggy!"

"Is no!" Antoine cried. "Is steamboat! Jes' Chris', tam t'ing blow de hell outen we. Ah sees hims on de Lac de Champlain; roar an' mak' fire an' den boom! Is no safe, not t'ousan' mile near."

"I'm going on her," Chid said.

"Non, non!"

"Don't be a damn' fool, Antoine. How can you get off an island except by boat? Once that Navy crowd gets ashore, they'll have us rounded off this island in five minutes."

They crept toward the thing which Antoine had named a steamboat. Chid could make out nothing of her detail save a tall shadow that reached into the sky and from which issued an occasional tiny wood spark. They dropped to the thing's deck, feeling their way to a warm spot where, curiously, there was no snow. Chid felt warm brick under his hands; then hot iron trembling with a slow bubbling surge. A huge stack of cord wood filled the space between the rail and the brick boiler foundation. They crawled into the woodpile, pulling over themselves a heavy tarpaulin which had covered the wood. Small red flames played lazily behind air holes in an iron door, and in the night above a valve blubbered like a tea kettle on a kitchen crane. It was warm and dry, and out of the awful stinging wind. Antoine trembled.

"It ain't nuthin'," Nez growled. "Nuthin' that'll hurt us more'n we been anyways. You see that fire tender open her right up, didn't you? Chid, what do you make o' it?"

"She's the *Firefly*, says so plain, of New York and Albany. Reckon no matter what she'll get us off this danged island."

"Gardamn! She ta' we to de sea. Den . . . boom!"

"Shush yourself, Antwine. These here pots cain't go to sea. Chid, you figure she might be headin' for Albany?"

"Likely she is. It's why her fires are up. I'm staying."

The east grayed with the false dawn. The snow hissed against the hot iron cylinder which rumbled so ominously. Nez passed his tobacco twist, and they each took a chew to assuage their hunger and hitched their belts an extra notch. Antoine complained and watched the purring contraption with apprehension.

It was true dawn, washing the snow with gray and purple, when Chid heard the far-off hail from the direction of the river. At first it sounded like a wolf call, muted by the snow, but, listening, Chid could make it out as a human voice.

"Ahoy! Ahoy the shipyard! Send a boat."

It was repeated again and again. Below them there were now stirring noises, as if men moved on the boat, and the fire-tender came again to stoke the iron cylinder. This time he threw twenty wood chunks through the door, and the rumbling became ominous. The man stopped suddenly and listened.

"What in hell you doin' about there?" he hailed through cupped hands.

"Ahoy, the yard. Send a boat. We got to get onto the ways."

"Who in hell're you?"

"United States Navy, damn your thick hide. That's Brown's yard, ain't it?"

"Aye, 'tis. But we can't send no boat in this ice; anyways not till the boys get here at seven. You fellers'll damn well wait till we're ready to fetch you."

Men were coming on deck now, moving cautiously over the new snow blanket. A flare glowed astern, yellow in the dawnlight. Chid made himself small, keeping under the tarpaulin, now as warm as if he were before Moses Leet's hearth again. Melting snow-water ran under him,

taking the ice out of his clothing and his bones, and men labored at the frozen hawsers under the direction of a calm low voice that Chid seemed vaguely to recognize.

The iron cylinder groaned and hissed. Smoke, laced with swirling wood sparks, poured from the chimney, and from aft of the woodpile there came suddenly a steady metallic clanking, like chain passing over a winch; then a fearful sucking beat from overside. Through the half-light Chid saw that they were moving slowly away from the wharf. But a long heavy hawser still stretched from the steamboat to the wharf.

"Clear a path to that ship, pilot," the calm voice said. "I've sent Mr. Killy to rouse out the hands and get number two ways ready to take him. Must have been in a scrap at sea. Pass him that dock line; he can warp himself in on his capstan. Mr. Chance, can you get us up the river?"

"Till the ice stops us, I can. Avast, sir, the navy vessel's hailin'."

"Chid, that's Master Steel on the schooner," Nez whispered. "This is a close squeak."

Chid could hear the bellow of the sailing master. It seemed almost directly above him, but he dared not look. The churning ceased, and the deck sounds echoed against the cold hull of the schooner like a drum in a well. The *Firefly's* hawser crawled to the *Blessed Cause*, and Chid heard the capstan pawls take up their steady cold music.

"It's all we can do for you right now," the calm voice said. "Put your bow on the cradle first, that's where you seem hurt most."

"You seen anythin' of two men got away from us last night?"

"No. We've been on board waiting the tide and daylight."

"They gave us the slip. We were taking them to the United States Marshal under arrest for piracy."

"Piracy?"

"Well, suspicions of it, anyway. One of them danged privateers gone crazy with easy prizes again. Two lads, they were; maybe not too guilty, but they sure had facts heaped against 'em."

"Raise the alarm ashore. We're moving to Albany while we can."

"Albany? Way up to river head?"

"Aye; Albany and four hundred miles beyond to Presque Isle."

"Never heard of that location, sir."

"You will. Good or bad, you will."

"Well, I'm obliged for the ways so quick."

"That's all right. This yard is all Navy since the war started; you'll find Lieutenant Chadwick in charge. You have a clear paddle-path through the ice now, and you'd better warp in before it closes. Mr. Chance, turn your water wheels now; we've got a long way to go."

Chid could almost touch the pilot's boots as the man climbed to the paddle box. He held a heavy iron-shod cane in his hand which he suddenly rapped sharply on the cylinder; twice; rap, rap—a signal to the engineer. The clanking and sucking commenced again immediately; the men on deck gave a feeble cheer and scuttled below, and the *Firefly* moved away from the schooner and into the bleak river. Ice stabbed at her, and the paddles crashed into the white ice floes with deafening booming and crunching. And alongside, giving them warmth and life, the iron cylinder grumbled and snarled, and every three seconds a queer yokelike beam flew into the air and plunged rapidly downward.

"Is on de way to Albany," Antoine whispered with satisfaction, used to the danger of the dreaded steamboat already. "Tam, Cheed, is one week dar to de Otter."

"I'm not going to the Big Otter," Chid said.

"Chid, you ain't got a chance; even in Albany. The gov'mint 'ud snag onto your trail in no time. On'y the bresh is safe," offered Nez.

"I got a chance where I'm going."

"Where at?"

"Presque Isle."

"Place o' fire, Chid! Are you addled?"

"Nope."

"You hunger-crazy?"

"Nope, but I'm right hungry, Nez. That feller you heard was Noah Brown."

"Jehovah! Chid, beware; he owes you one."

"He won't pay it," Chid said easily. "I got him where he won't; not if shipbuilders are as scarce as he said they were. I reckon you and Antoine ought to come with me."

"Well, we don't."

"Look," Chid said, "I belong here, kind of. You two don't. You're those

two prisoners from the schooner Mr. Brown heard tell about. You are . . . unless I tell 'em you ain't, Nez."

"Blast you, Chid! Don't be so goddamn smart. Me an' Antwine don't admire to have you save your own hide usin' us rotten like this."

"I'm not using you rotten. I don't even need you; though I'll admit free it'll help my case some. Look, they'd ferret us out of the Big Otter country soon's word spread. We'd be always on the jump. Up to Presque Isle we'd have the best protection a man could want."

"Like what?"

"Well, it's remote."

"So's Antwine's crick."

"But look. At Presque Isle we're valuable to Noah Brown, and to Perry. Shucks, they'd make a fight to keep us, I'll bet; though they wouldn't even likely hear about us being wanted. But if it came on to getting crowded, why, Nez, we just got to step into Canada and we're safe."

"Canady!"

"A-yep."

"Non!" Antoine exploded sharply. "Is why Ah come to de States; me. Tam, Cheed, is one woman dar, look fo' Antoine wit' de heart lak de wil' cat. Fin' Antoine; is dead, me—lak nozzing!"

"Chid, you're jest gettin' things complicated again. I'm damn sick o' it; it turns my gut, havin' to live a eternal dodge. Gramp Nott's camp was hellions compared to us, but nobody bothered us 'cause we lived peaceable amongst ourselves. We can do the same. I reckon I'd even like it again, way off in the hills an' removed from the botherin' things I've had ever since I fust come down to Portersville five years back."

"Might be," Chid said, "but how can a man make money up in the lonesome hills, Nez? You got to be near where money is to gather it, and I reckon Presque Isle might have a heap of it now with shipbuilding and all."

Nez chumped on a splinter for a long minute, rolled on his belly, studying Chid from propped elbows. The *Firefly* trembled and vibrated and rammed into the ice. She had turned the Battery and entered the North River, and the snow and wind drove now from the outboard side, dispelling the heat under the tarpaulin.

"Chid," Nez said, speaking with deadly earnestness, "there ain't nobody in God's creation can make me go to this here Presque Isle if I don't want to. But I want to go. You know why?"

"It's handy to Canada if trouble comes too close."

"Don't say that no more. And don't say money no more either. Chid, I got to talk plain an' to hell with if you like it or not. You shipped privateerin' for money an' I shipped for sport, an' we both o' us got skunked and set in the midst o' bad trouble. We was wrong from the beginnin'; mostly 'bout suthin' we scarce knew existed up to home. I mean this here United States business, Chid. But now we do, both o' us, an' we ain't got no excuse for our doin's no more. Chid, we been like damn' spyin' Britishers minglin' with American folks an' stabbin' them in their backs. We don't go to make a good nation; we pull it down. Gramp Nott, I lay, wouldn't've let us remain in his camp, bad as it was. A man could do anythin' he wanted, but he had to be honorable about it. We ain't been; no more'n Fish an' Tinker an' Mr. Lidbody, Chid, this nation's sick an' beset, an' we're a-pickin' on her when she's down complete."

"You been hearing preaching?"

"You might say; on'y not the kind you think I did. I hear'n it from myself mostly. Alec Drake, he died in my arms, Chid. You know what he said a'fore his eyes shet? 'God save Master Perry an' the United States o' Ameriky,' he said, reverent as hell, an' he died."

"I saw Bob Crown's brother die similar to that."

"Well, it should have signified, Chid. When men die they say what's in their hearts, not jest words. Them lads o' the *Adder* was to sea almost stiddy for nigh seven months; but never a grievin' word did they have at mess. You think Noah Brown has to go traipsin' to that godforsaken Presque Isle to make money with a shipyard like he's got here? Or that Perry, who could likely get any soft job from Congress he'd be minded to? No, sir! Them fellers is pure good inside; givin' what they got to this here sick nation. But, it seems 's if, for one o' them kind there's two o' us'n. We blank 'em out, Chid, and when the goin' gets rocky we talk o' slidin' into the enemy's camp, slick's a weasel."

"I wouldn't be an enemy."

"Oh, yes you would. The minute you saw a loose dollar 'round you'd track it down, an' to hell with who pays for it; British, Yankee, or Injun. Yer a leech, Chid; both o' us are. You can't only earn dollars an' fun; you got to earn the right to earn 'em fust. You got to be part an' passel o' folks what make it possible, to call it a tribe or a town or a nation. I ain't reformed or nuthin', Chid... I jest never been far enough away from Portersville an' that stinkin' Noank to catch on how things really was. Now I see 'em good an' clear, an' I wish you would too."

"I do sometimes."

"I expect you're bright enough to. On'y you squelch 'em when they come botherin'. I did for a while, too, but I ain't peaceful inside no more. I'll bet you ain't either, times."

"You didn't talk like that back home. You even tricked me onto the *Blessed Cause*."

"I didn't know about these things then, Chid. Now I do. Didn't that there shipyard make you feel good this mornin', kind o' homy, like's if you got your hands an' your wits on suthin' understandable?"

"A-yep."

"Well, it did me. I want to catch up with that feelin' again. I want to go to Presque Isle an' work like hell an' feel with the good folks o' this nation. I wisht I could say it better, Chid."

"Is good, dat." Antoine nodded soberly. "Is better to do dan say; but, Chid, how you mak' us go to de Presque Isle?"

"I can do it easy, Antoine."

"With no trouble, Chid?"

"No trouble till it catches up with us, Nez."

"All right; go ahead. But, Chid, I sure wish you'd be headin' there for the same reason I an' Antwine is."

"I guess I will be, for a while."

Chid crept out from under the cover. The *Firefly* moved in a white whirling world, trembling fearfully, only the hot boiler and stack and the green patches of the river showing dark. The pilot was a white snow man on the larboard paddle box, his trumpet and signal cane poised. At the fire door a man poked four-foot logs into the hungry flames, one every minute. The cross-yoke plunged up and down, up and down, and the paddles sucked and crashed into ice. Aft, at the tiller, two men stood,

snow-plastered. One smoked a home-whittled alder pipe and the other a thin seegar.

Chid, stretching, strode boldly to them.

"Good morning, Mr. Brown. I'm Chid Alwyn."

"You ought to be in jail," Mr. Brown said, grinning.

"I reckon. I had considerable trouble getting here."

"You ran off after the fire, didn't you?"

"No, sir. Not exactly. I came down the coast a ways to get two friends to go along with me. One's a ship's carpenter and the other's a logger. Thought they might come in handy."

"They will indeed."

"They're forward, sir. We got a little nipped last night, and we came over the ice to the yard, and it seemed all-fired warm alongside that hot iron affair amidships."

"You weren't the only ones," Mr. Brown nodded, not smiling, "but you were the last. Chid, bring your friends below. I expect there's still a bite of breakfast handy for you. Moses Leet and I were certain that you had shipped on the *Blessed Cause*."

"My Golly! I had an apprenticeship to serve out, Mr. Brown."

"So you did, boy," Noah Brown said. "So you did."

"Till August," Chid said.

"Aye, till August."

It was a good breakfast; regular tavern food. Moses Leet was tickled to see him, and he said he was very much relieved, very much indeed. Nez was showing the company how to split a chip at six yards thirty minutes after he'd said howdy all around. Antoine crawled behind a berth curtain, clutching his wounded leg, explaining that Yankee dunder always hit him in the leg.

"You want to play strap?" a man at the cabin table asked Chid, "a copper a rubber, Mr. Alwyn?"

"Nope," said Chid, "I ain't got a cent to my name right this minute."

"Embarrassin', ain't it?"

"Nope. Just kind o' challenging, sir," said Chid.

PART II

THE TRIALS

Chapter Eight

THE WAY OF the winter traveler from New York City to Lake Erie in the year of 1813 was by the long road; from Albany to Utica to Geneva, and then into the wilderness beyond. The Lake Erie turnpike road to the south of it, which extended the new Military Road, was for the most part still a promise of the politicians and the land agents. It wound its muddy, log-paved way westward in irregular links of road, Indian trail, surveyors' blazes, and rolling virgin forest. Nobody used the Erie Road in winter. From Bath to the lake there wasn't a decent traveler's house nor a village fit to be called such.

The Ontario and Genesee Turnpike Road, which held to its early name of the Great Genesee Road, was the popular and safe one. It shot almost straight westward from Utica, for two hundred and twenty miles, to Buffalo Creek and the lake. The way to the great artery was through Schenectady and along the Mohawk River, by the double well-traveled road which boasted any number of taverns: Bent's, Dewight's, Hudson's Indian Castle, Mr. Aldridge's at German Flats, and then a good hotel with an inside wash barrel and a separate ladies' refreshment parlor at Fort Schuyler in Utica. From here one half the road crawled northward, along Oneida and the Oswego Creek to Lake Ontario and the fighting country. The Great Road continued west, the one reliable road to the Genesee Country. Military stores and settlers' needs and mill machinery and farm tools and bolt goods from far-away China went over the road in an endless stream of heavy wagons drawn by matched teams. And settlers and immigrants; always people and more people. And many were now in uniform; uniforms of the militia and of the dandy town brigades and of the regular Army and a very few of the Navy, for behind Ontario, near Sackett's Harbor, a great

force was gathering to whip the British who threatened on the northern shore of the great lake.

The road wound through the old Military Lands, past Van Epp's and Mr. Wemp's in the Oneida Reservation, and Sill's and Young Keeler's, whose spring tasted of salt and was said to have salubrious effects upon those suffering with gout or bilious fever; and from Onondaga Hollow it went to Rice's on Nine Mile Creek and vanished for a few muddy rods at the Cayuga Ferry, and at last arrived at Geneva, where Mr. Powell's tavern had a new signboard naming it, with pride and bold challenge, a first-rate city hotel. Roads branched from the turnpike, north and south; but mostly to the south, for nobody yet knew for sure whether north was British or American country. Since the Revolution and before, there had always been the British, just across Ontario.

The settlers and immigrants scattered into the rich farm lands about Geneva, sharpening their plows for a sure harvest. The men in uniform, what few reached Geneva, went on to the westward to New Hartford; hanging on a last nipper at Searson's, on the State Road; then marched northward along the Genesee River and past the four great falls and so to the forts of the lake. And some went on to Batavia and there followed the Tonawanda and came out of the brush under the rear-guard guns of General Smythe's ragged army that kept the British on the far side of the rapids of the tumbling Niagara River.

It was a populous teeming road, in winter and in summer, and the taverns never shut their doors day or night. The back fences of the original wagon yards had been knocked down long ago, throwing open the rolling fields beyond the ever-increasing number of teams and wagons and sleds. Two stages a week, one with United States mail, rattled from frontier Geneva to Albany, the four matched bays of each always at the gallop and the box horn truculently demanding the clear road.

The immigrants were Yankees and Jersey-men, and Germans and Irishers and English and Swiss and watery-eyed Scandinavians. Sometimes they were herded along in great bands by a suave seegar-smoking land agent. But they were always eager and impatient to push along the road to the fabulous stoneless bottom lands in the new country, said to cost only nine dollars the acre to clear and plant, and the first year to yield twenty-five to the acre in any crop you cared to name.

There were no mountains; just gently rounded swells of smooth land, crested with hardwoods and pines and cedars, and between them were well-watered intervals of poplar and alder and great natural cleared fields, protected and warm, where the grass grew so lush that a full-grown bullock couldn't be seen in it at harvest time. And here and there were ancient Indian orchards, needing only pruning to yield fruit; and crumbled French forts where a man could find lead and iron and sometimes gold coins. To the north, indeed all about, were lakes, endless lovely lakes which tempered the north winds; and to the south were the rugged Pennsylvania Mountains which held back the humid withering weather of summer and the rotting rains of winter. A man could, like the Indians before him, grow apples better than any other place in the States, and he was taking no chances at all if he was of a mind to put in tender peaches or grapes or truck vegetables. Everything grew and prospered in the Genesee Country.

Travelers came, and preachers and gamblers and fakers and politicians and, lately, recruiters. It was good land, with good growing towns and hundreds of mills and scores of distilleries. It was worth saving and worth fighting for; it was a precious home to sixty thousand people. The recruiters didn't have much trouble signing these men into the Army; nothing like they had in bitter, war-scarred New England. Folks here had something to defend. The recruiters' fifers didn't blow a note a week; the drinks were on the recruit, not the recruiter. You had just to mention the British and how they were getting ready to invade, and these men would look at you with sober eyes and sign with heavy, grim strokes.

Only the Indians had to be liquored into joining. They would come in from the reservations, or more likely lurch from behind the wagon yards where they lived in dirty bottle-strewn hogans; dull-eyed, lousy, fat creatures. A good recruiter could make them touch the pen after three drinks if he named them in proper order—gin, rum, and then gin spiked with rum, none with spices or butter—and have them marching north four hours later.

There was an army to receive them there; the army to which these vast stores were going. General Dearborn was at its head; a cautious man learning war as he went along. And there was a navy, too, though

that was something that the York folks didn't take much stock in. An officer named Chauncey, a Congress-commodore, was in charge of it. He had even built some ships, small ones, some of them not much bigger than the arks which drifted cattle and boards and sacked grain down the Conhocton and Canisteo, and so to distant Baltimore. The house carpenters of the new country from as far west as Bath and New Hartford had helped in the building of these boats, working under the direction of a New York master shipwright named Henry Eckford, a man who loved ships and seemed to understand their mysteries first rate.

But these things were all to the north and the east of the Genesee Country.

The land beyond, to the west, was an unsettled wilderness. The great road led, almost straight as a crow's flight, through thick forests and gradually flattening land to lazy Buffalo Creek; thence along the creek to the shores of Lake Erie. On the road, once Batavia was passed, there was not a sizable village; none which attempted to afford the comforts and luxuries of the eastern state towns. Mr. Peterson, who traded in furs, held open house for the few who traveled the road at Big Spring, and beyond one Ganson had a rough log tavern with straw-covered puncheon beds and admittedly cut liquor. From there there was nothing much until you reached the tiny hamlets of New Amsterdam and Black Rock on the lake itself.

Renegade Indians prowled along the road here, and British deserters and highwaymen who sometimes relieved travelers of purses and lives in thirty swift seconds. It was flat, desolate land, not poor but not as rich as that farther east near the lakes of Cayuga and Seneca and Canandaigua and Crooked. North of the road here were the mysterious Hepatic and Inflammable Air Holes, treasured for some obscure reason by all of the Six Nations Indians; and near the end of the turnpike, a short haul north of Black Rock, were the Great Falls of the Niagara.

These were worth viewing according to the surveyors and Indian missionaries and the few who had traveled to see them. They fell from the rapids of the Niagara River one hundred and seventy feet to a magnificent gorge which emptied into Lake Ontario. It was the only interruption in a watercourse thousands of miles long, from Lake Superior to the St. Lawrence River and the Atlantic Ocean. On the British side of

the obstruction there was a team carry of eleven miles. Since long before the turn of the century there had been mild agitation to build a canal from the Tonawanda River, which emptied into the Niagara above the Falls, to Mud Creek and the Genesee and thus short-cut the road. The proposal was to construct a lift-lock canal around the four falls of the Genesee and by it bring large vessels to and from Ontario and Erie.

There was talk of it again; had been since the war had commenced ten months ago. Both Commodore Chauncey and Dearborn, it was known, believed that a naval force was needed on Erie to back up General Harrison's army which lay bivouacked and waiting to strike at Detroit, now in British hands. But a canal opening both lakes was out of the question now. It would take years to build. And, as some pointed out, it would lead only to the guns of the British forts which covered the Niagara from the Tonawanda to the lake. General Smythe was in the vicinity of Black Rock with six hundred assorted companies, but the few travelers who came eastward along the Great Genesee Turnpike this winter reported that he had all he could do to keep the British on their own side of the river and away from the tiny new navy yard, much less cover vessels being towed against the rapids into the lake.

So there came along the road not canal builders but shipbuilders. At first they were house shinglers and barn builders and cordwood sawyers. Some had helped build Commodore Chauncey's little ships last fall. There were not many of them, a score at the most, traveling by wagon under heavy fur robes and with their tools in the box behind. They went to Black Rock, reporting to Lieutenant Jesse Elliot, a Navy man, then were swallowed by the denser wilderness to the westward along Erie's rugged shore. Rumors came back along the road; horrible rumors, disheartening and discouraging like those of last year which told of the frightful massacre on the River Raisin and of the shameful surrender of Detroit and of the occupation of the whole of the Michigan Lands by the British and their drunken looting redskins. It was said that the first detachments of carpenters had been killed by raiding Indians while felling trees. Another story had it that some of the men had escaped down the Allegany from Presque Isle and reached Philadelphia, more dead than alive. Of the two later detachments, nothing was heard. No

stores or materials went over the turnpike to them; no news or carpenters came back; no navy grew.

The people around New Hartford and Batavia and Bath prepared for the winter with growing apprehension. The British, it was now plain to see, were not only north of them but west as well. The enemy, so the veterans of the '77 war said testily, was up to his old tricks: building the perfect army before invading. He was establishing his chain of communications and supply routes along the northern shores of both lakes, connecting the Michigan army with the seaboard; making them impregnable. "How," these veterans asked with reason, "can twenty carpenters build a navy? What happened to the ships we had on the lake? Aye, the British captured them! Where's Harrison; what's he doing? Anyway, say we did hold Erie open—couldn't the British use the north shore of the lake?" The defense of Erie and the pathetic preparations made so far were considered hopeless. The whole situation along the border, the stupid generals, the insufficiently trained men, and the lack of supplies were just new evidences of the utter stupidity of Jemmy Madison's easy-going Congress.

Many families moved eastward during December and January. It was an unusually severe winter, nothing like the mild ones which the land agents had promised were eternal. The rivers and creeks lay frozen and snow-covered. You took an auger even to a deep well if you wanted water. The northern lights flared with mysterious flutterings and flame-like color whenever it came off a clear night, which wasn't often. Bands of wolves roamed the intervalles, howling against the biting winds and the deep snow, crust upon crust. Mr. Ganson buried his rum casks in manure and locked his log tavern, then sledded it along the Great Bend Road all the way to Newton on the Tioga. He went not only east, but south as well. "Fifteen hundred fruzzen sojers an' a dozen barn carpenters, buildin' a damned navy, between me an' the British! East ain't enough, I snum!" he said at New Hartford and drove on.

Geneva called back half of its militia brigade from the Army of the North along Ontario's shores. Other towns followed suit. They came with white frost on their buckles and blue toes sticking through their worn cow-hide boots, and their bellies were thin under the silk frogs of their swallow-tail jackets and their faces gaunt beneath their cockaded

plug hats. They went on sullen sentry duty before their own farms and around the fires told bitterly of the lack of food and equipment and leadership in the army of General Dearborn. "The Navy? Great Jehovah, neighbor, they don't do nuthin'. Nuthin' 'tall! Sails up, sails down; gun practice with hardwood shot, busted this an' busted that, an' they don't move a damned inch; alwus waitin'—for sailors, for guns, for shot, for surgeons, for rope, for officers; damn it!—for guts!"

The snow came again in early February; heavy large flakes, falling straight and silently, hushing an already hushed and threatened land. The biggest lakes froze over, Oneida and Crooked, and there was ice even on deep Cayuga, and the sleds from Utica broke new snow each morning as they toiled slowly westward to Geneva. Beyond Geneva there was but the mail rider's single track to New Hartford. Beyond New Hartford the Great Geneva Turnpike lay unbroken; a dull white serpent writhing over the hills and intervalles between frosted green pines and ending at Lake Erie where twenty men had gone to build a navy.

And into this bitter, desolate country, the eight heavily laden sleds cutting deeply into the smooth snow blanket, came Noah Brown and his thirty-nine shipbuilders.

"Ordinary," said Moses Leet, downing the rum, "I don't imbibe. But, Chid, I reckon a man's better for it in this weather."

"It's bitter," Chid said. "There ain't no salt in the air to temper it." He downed his rum in one swallow.

"I never knew you to take more than flip," Moses said, plunging his mittened hands into his pockets and hunching himself against the driving wind. "Chid, you sure you were nipped that night you came on the *Fire-fly*?"

"I'm afraid so, Moses. We had a powerful amount against coming down the coast in the snow."

"Well," Moses said, looking at him keenly, "it sure hit you hard. You looked kind o' scairt an' whupped, boy; not just likkored up."

"No," Chid said, "I guess I was nipped, all right."

"I'm going to write home tonight, before we jump off," Moses said. "Mary'll be glad you didn't go on the *Blessed Cause*, Chid. You should have spoke with her before you left."

"I didn't have anything to say," Chid said. "I'm not ready to speak yet, Moses."

"I don't know, boy," the old carpenter said quietly. "She'd listen. Our gal don't want the things you want; they don't count much after a while, an' she's got sense enough to see that."

"They count for me."

"I see that, Chid. But money an' station an' such don't make you rich; not sure-fire rich. There's other things."

"Tell Mary my love, Moses. And Aunt Leety, too. Come August I'll be free, and it will be different."

"Your job won't be finished by then; it'll take a long time to get this here fleet ready."

"The fleet ain't my job; that's Mr. Brown's and Perry's. I'm just a tool for 'em for a while. They got a right only to my labor."

"What's behind them, Chid, has a right to your heart, even to your plans an' your dreams an' your life."

"You talk like Nez. He got patriotism like Friends get religion—sudden."

"I noticed. An' he's a better man for it, Chid."

"Well, it bothers me, times. But I don't see it, Moses."

"I pray to God you will, boy. It's all that's wrong with you."

They got into the sleds again, drawn up in line on the white road before Mr. Ganson's deserted tavern. Nez had led the break-in and found the rum under the manure easily. He considered Mr. Ganson's loss only just; when a man hung out a tavern sign, it was his bounden duty to be around and make good on it.

"Come on, boys," Nez trumpeted, "we got to push on afore the boss fetches us. He ain't one to admire you fellers enterin' a poor tavern so. I'm danged glad I was able to stop you!"

"Cripes, Nez, how fur's the temprachure got to drop to cease you clownin'?" grinned a carpenter.

"'Bout twicet's cold's 'tis."

"Now, that's a cozy riddle, boys. How cold's twicet as cold as now? That's one to chew on 'tween towns, ain't it?"

The sleds moved on, the horses plodding into the raw sharp wind. Mr. Brown always rode in the last sled. "To cover the rear," he had

joked. Nez had joked right back, "To kick the rear, Uncle Noah, case anybody decides to drap out, hunh?" Nez called him Uncle Noah right out, and Mr. Brown didn't seem to mind. It sounded odd; Noah Brown wasn't much older than Nez himself save in years.

"It's his beard makes him a uncle," Nez had grinned once. "Uncles all have beards. But I envy him it; ain't nuthin' warmer'n a lush beard 'round sweet-water cold. I aim to have me one."

"Look out you don't calk it right into a seam some day, Nez."

"God a'mighty! Uncle Noah's welcome to it if it'll make a ship to whup them British. Last two days it's downright depressin' seein' them towns so scairt o' the invasion."

It was early afternoon. The sky was lowery and threatened still more snow, and the wind blew steadily from the northwest. Batavia, as the Big Plain Station folks wanted their settlement to be called, was at least three hours distant.

The road was easy; not many up-hills. But the men welcomed even a small grade; it gave them an excuse to get out and push and walk to keep warm. There were forty carpenters, only eleven of them from Portersville. Two were from New London and two from Essex, on the Connecticut, and there was a logger from Haddam. The rest were New York and Jersey men. Mr. Brown, so the word went, hadn't been pleased with the way New England had helped, but he hadn't been surprised. Even the British regarded New England as still doubtful and, counting on the unpopularity of the war east of Long Island, hadn't extended the blockade to it yet.

Chid did not know all the men. There hadn't been time to during the quick trip of the *Firefly*. Near Albany, with the bow rammed deep into solid ice, the pilot had thrown his signal stick into the wake in defeat and made them walk up the frozen river. Since then the group had broken into small sled parties; five carpenters to the sled plus the hired driver. The tools and the bags and trunks alone made a good pull. Chid rode with Nez and Antoine and two of the Tatum apprentices. Bob Crown traveled with a brooding bitterness, thinking always of the death of his brother and the villainy of Mr. Lidbody. Sylvester Tatro spent the weary miles under all the robes the sled afforded suffering with a severe cold.

Culver Coons and Tonk Slinker, who were both block-maker's apprentices, were in another sleigh with Epaphras North and the other New Englanders. Mr. Brown wouldn't risk mixing them with York or Jersey men. A short distance beyond Ganson's the lead sled stopped at the call of an Indian who stood with upraised hand in the road between the flanking snow-laden cedars. The man wanted a lift to Black Rock.

"Go back in the sled with the boys," the driver said, clucking to the team. "They ain't so heavy's us."

The Indian sprang into the sled, musket tightly clutched, and nestled beside the carpenters in the box. Chid could smell the rancid grease with which he had protected himself from the winter; a sweet sickish smell that was always to mean Indian to him. But the man was to leeward, for which they were all grateful.

"What you shaved for?" Nez inquired sharply.

"No shaved; hair cut, like sojer," the Indian grunted. He was an old man, his leathery face a mass of expressionless wrinkles, but his body was lithe as a young buck forest runner's.

"You be, too! You're readyin' to paint for war."

"No paint. Friend; ver' good. Damn British. Me, army runner, Captain Brown, York m'litia. From Sackett."

"You be? How's the ships doin' there?"

"Ver' good, oh, ver' good. Captain, he want more. Have message. Where Elliot boat man?"

"Oh, him. Why, he's to Black Rock, waitin' for Perry to come. Let's see the message."

"No. For Elliot. You sojer?"

"Hell, no! We're carpenters. We got to build the ships on Erie."

"Damn fool," the Indian said. "You got tobac'?"

Nez let him grind off a chew of twist. The Indian spit once, then covered his head with his blanket and subsided into a piece of lifeless freight. They rode on in silence. The snow creaked under the runners and the team plowed tiredly into the drifts pastern-deep and better. It was dark when the two dim lights of Batavia appeared like red angry stars between the drooped, defeated ears of the horses.

The village was one of the newest on the road, built beside a future mill-site on a Tonawanda feeder. There were already six frame houses,

lying unpainted and stark in the smooth flat snow. The other buildings were log-built, single cabins with the end sash long since boarded against the winter. There was no traveler's house, just a tiny store-tavern with a single teamster's dormitory above and piles of stale tangled straw to which a man could help himself if he wanted some padding under him.

In the face of so much unexpected business, Hank Purdy, the boniface, forgot to be genial. He looked the party over doubtfully. They filled his taproom, crowding about his small fire, clothes steaming and heavy boots melting small pools on his sanded floor.

"You ain't Quakers," Hank said. "You sure ain't land agents or missionaries. Wait; let Purdy guess."

"The British Army," Nez said.

"Oh, no!" Hank said but looked scared nevertheless.

"We're shipbuilders, landlord," Mr. Brown interposed. "We want a good meal and bedding down until daylight. I'll pay for it now, in gold, so you won't get it confused with the liquor scores later."

"Shipbuilders! God in the mountains; in this woods? I d'clare. We need soldiers and they send us shipbuilders. In gold, you say? None o' them damned paper notes?"

"Gold, landlord."

"Why, welcome, damn it! Purdy can pervide handsome, an' it'll be a dollar a man, without spiruts or extras, you know what I mean. Teams can go inter the shed, free, save you want to pamper 'em with grain. The Injun's got to go there too; this is a decent place."

Mr. Brown counted out forty dollars, then sat down before the fire and lighted a seegar.

"A dozen o' ye in the loft above; pervidin' you boys promise to lay 'cross the beams. You lay with 'em, an' ye'll like break through an' get scrambled with them as sleep below here. Some'll have to bed round the town houses I can get for you."

"The apprentices can go out," Mr. Brown said.

"Aye. So you'll want likkor, hey? A good tootin' afore you jump off; it's nacheral, ain't it? But I want to say fair, we ain't got sufficient wimmin. This ain't fancy wenchin' kentry like east. Hell, forty'd tax even Uticy, I 'low. I on'y got th'ee gals to call; an' you gents please let 'em be till they get yer victuals served."

Chid reckoned that Mr. Purdy delayed the meal deliberately. It was almost two hours before the kettles of hard potatoes and indifferent corn-mush cakes and gravy-warmed venison came to the long table hastily made by laying rough frost-stippled boards across the few regular tavern tables. He sold a good deal of rum during the wait. Chid would have liked a noggin, but he was utterly penniless. The condition depressed him; made him blindly angry at fate. Two thousand dollars had been in his hands within the week. Now he was broke, as he hadn't been since he was fifteen.

Three girls waited on them, two of them busy with the bar orders entirely. The one at the table was a slight sallow-complexioned girl with long dull black hair falling in two braids over her shoulders and over her high, small breasts. She was small, almost tiny, and she took particular care of Chid.

"What's your name, pretty?" Nez demanded, observing.

"Beaumelle."

"God! Beaumelle what?"

"Trask. I'm extra for Hank."

"Well, he's got a eye! But you better don't make such a extry fuss over Chid here. Chid's got a gal."

"Shut up, Nez."

The men were noisy. Somebody started a song after the weak unsugared tea. It was a graver's short drag. In the beating refrain in which they all joined you could almost hear the thud of the graver's mauls as they crashed on the oak wedges; and the creak of the hull as it was gripped in the pole shores, like the hub of a wagon wheel, and you could feel the cold dripping of the dank masonry benches of the graving dock. It made Chid homesick for salt water and the smell of ships building and acrid oak chisel chips. And, curiously, for Mary Leet; for things he could understand and get a grip on.

The song ended in a burst of drunken whooping. Nez was asked to split a chip. He sliced one from the board table and stuck it on the log wall sixteen paces away.

"Every split'll cost somebody one drink, boys!"

"Sure! Go ahead, Nez."

Nez earned six drinks, one right after the other. He gave Chid the

third one. Antoine tried, bemoaning the loss of his double-bitted ax, and earned two drinks. Mr. Brown dozed over his writing portfolio. Moses Leet laboriously wrote his letter with a quill pen and berry ink, thinned with cider vinegar. The two bar girls moved about nimbly, ducking the good-natured experimental slaps aimed at them. It was the last night for a toot. Tomorrow, the real wilderness, the jump-off for Black Rock, and then the long unknown road to Presque Isle where a man was cut off from everything, saving, perhaps, more danger than it was pleasant to think about now and for some the deep inward contentment of unselfish service.

Beaumelle touched Chid lightly on the shoulder.

"You're to sleep at Pa's," she said.

"All right. I'm ready to."

"Jesus!" a man close to Chid cried. "Why ain't we still apprentices?"

Chid followed the girl, feeling his neck hot and red. It felt good to get into the cold dark night, away from the coarse out-spoken envy. She was a small dark figure, walking in the snow beside him. The cold had subdued the wind. It was still as an idle ship's hold. A fox barked far in the distance, towards Black Rock. The northern lights made a pale greenish boiling beyond a stand of naked hickory.

"It's the coldest yet," the girl said. "Unseasonable."

"I expect. What's your pa do?"

"Teams. But mostly he drinks. He's in jail now."

"Is your ma home?"

"No; she was killed at Fort Dearborn by British Indians."

"That's hard to hear. Look, I better not go home with you."

"Don't be silly," Beaumelle said. "I accommodate Hank like this lots. Pa ain't never to home."

"Does he pay you?"

"Yes; he takes it off what Pa owes him. Put some bark on the fire; we don't need no candle."

The cabin was a poor single-roomed log one, furnished with hand-made stuff of pine board and hickory slash. A decent-sized fireplace occupied the center of one end wall, and a rope bed stood in the center of the other. A sapling ladder led to the loft, now shut off by a trap

door. It was warm and homy, and the bark-light threw long wavering shadows against the uneven log walls.

"In the loft or down here?" the girl asked.

"Down here for me," Chid said.

She seemed even smaller than before, but, silhouetted before the fire, stretching her fingers to the heat, Chid saw that she was rounded and warmly formed; not skinny or sallow as she had appeared under the harsh tavern lights. He guessed that she might own to eighteen. She had a strange sweet smell about her; something like when he had once breathed in the smell of Mary's chestnut hair on a spring night.

She sat down beside Chid on the puncheon bench before the hearth and took off her shoes. "I always leave them by the fire. You better too. Can I call you Chid?"

"Surely."

Chid took his moccasins off, then stuffed the stockings which he had borrowed from Moses into them. The girl hung them over a chair back. She watched Chid with dark searching eyes, studying him. He was handsome in a way that she was not used to; tall and broad and bronze-colored with hair that looked, in the firelight, like golden straw.

She got up and went over to the bed. Chid could hear the patter of her bare feet and the rustle of her clothing as she hung it on the pegs on the warm wall opposite the fire. He kept his eyes in the flames, not wanting to look. Then he heard suddenly, and disturbingly, the creak of the bed ropes.

"Chid, ain't you sleepy?"

"Some. I'll need the candle to see in the loft."

"You don't need to go to the loft, Chid."

He stopped at the ladder. "It wasn't nice of me to grab the warmest place for myself," he said.

"Don't you understand, Chid?"

"A-yep," Chid said quietly, trying to hide his confusion. "I reckon. Look, I wasn't meaning to—Miss Trask, I ain't got a cent of money."

"It don't matter, Chid," the girl said from the bed.

Chid could feel her eyes staring at him from the dark bed corner. He felt as if he had taken a sudden draught of rum on a cold day, felt

the queer pounding pulsations of it. He sat on the bench again, feeling suddenly weak.

Beaumelle jumped nimbly from the bed and sat beside him, hunched forward toward the fire, looking into it with him. Her hands were clasped, and her toes curled from the floor. She was very close.

"Chid, this is somehow different. I wouldn't mind."

"You're about the only girl I ever was this close to," Chid said. "I never thought about it much. I guess it ain't been in my dreams."

"What are your dreams about? That girl?"

"Part."

"What's her name?"

"Mary Leet. She comes from my town back on salt."

"Do you love her, Chid?"

"I guess I do. Only not this way. She's more just part of my plans. I'm waiting until they come true before..."

"What?"

"Well, thinking of her close and real like you."

"You're a funny fellow, Chid," the girl said. "Most men grab onto the girl first off, anyways they can; then worry about dreaming for her."

"That don't seem right. It's like building a ship; you got to plan it all out careful, then lay her up just right, everything fitted neat and of first-rate quality. You got to be certain of each step, so it can't go bad on you, else everything's spoiled later if something goes wrong."

She leaned close to him, her head on his shoulder and her black hair soft against his cheek. Chid, leaning back against the wall, let her lie there. She was soft and warm, but oddly it did not annoy him now.

"You're awful good, Chid," she said.

"No, I ain't. I can't help thinking things out and kind of planning them. I reckon I'd be unhappy if I didn't."

"What do you want to do?"

"Get free, I guess."

"No, I mean now, Chid."

Chid didn't reply. He wasn't shocked, nor scared. Beaumelle was nice, nicer than Jerushy and Ruby at Mr. Halliday's, who were girls like

her. He felt oddly comfortable with her, yet terribly aware of her. She put his arm around her, and he left it there.

"Tell me about your girl, Chid."

"Yes; that's what I'd like to do. Talk, just talk."

It felt good, putting Mary into words. He never had before. She was hardly flesh and blood in his own thoughts, just an objective like his dreams of money and the shipyard. It was queer, shaking and exciting, having Mary come alive and desirable to him sitting hundreds of miles away from her with a strange girl nestled warmly beside him. Moses had said that his girl would listen. It had never occurred to Chid that she might not. Moses had said some other things, too, things that he thought about out loud now.

He didn't tell the girl about the trouble he was in. His instinctive caution made him silent about that. But he wanted to tell her. He wanted to tell her everything, just have her listen and lie close to him before the warm embers.

"I reckon you think I'm a stubborn fool," Chid said, "driving on with plans so. Trouble is, I ain't seen no better ones, or no better way to make mine come out right. I can't help it, like I said. A girl ain't an ornament. She's got a right to ask a man how she's going to do, living into his life and such things. I figure she's got her own plans to be loyal to, and her plans have naturally got money and station and comfort and security in 'em."

"She's got something you ain't mentioned, Chid. She's got love in her plans, and the rest of it can go hang when she meets the man that she loves."

"It don't make sense," Chid said, "but I think you're right; partways, anyway."

"Yes, I'm right. Chid, you love that girl; love her all you can, even over the long miles. Don't make plans, just you love Mary Leet; that's the most important part of them. No matter what goes wrong, you'll have that. And she will... oh, Chid!"

The girl was crying against his shoulder, crowding her face into his neck. He could feel the warm tears, and the brush of her wet lashes. Her arm crept about him, holding him tightly to her. After a while she looked into his face.

"Chid."

"A-yep."

"Will you kiss me?"

Chid kissed her. Her lips were warm and sweetly trembling. She lay close in his arms, her heart beating against him.

"Now go up to the loft, Chid."

"Good night."

"Good night, Chid. I won't cry any more. I never wanted to kiss a man before."

"You didn't?"

"No. They just wanted to kiss me. Good night."

Chid slept good. He woke up still feeling baffled by the girl below. It was funny, a girl like her wanting just to be kissed.

The sleds pushed on at dawn. The men were quiet and inclined to nod on the long windless stretches. Nez said that it had been quite a party; quite a party. They got into Black Rock just before nightfall. Against the dull sunset Chid saw the spars of a schooner, moored in the naval basin. It was the best place he'd seen on the journey yet.

Chapter Nine

THE EATING PLACE at Black Rock was in the barracks of the militia company which did guard duty at the tiny new navy yards. It was a long low log building at the end of a deep shoveled snowpath which led to the basin in which several small boats were moored so that their guns commanded the narrow entrance to the place. The drifted snow reached almost to the eaves of the messhouse and lay soft and deep on the shallow A-roof. The tracks of an animal led over the roof to the stone chimney as if the beast had followed the smell of food to it.

It was warm inside, and crowded with militiamen. Their muskets stood in racks flanking the slab door, and innumerable pairs of boots and pieces of woollen clothing dried on a ledge pole before the great fireplace at one end of the room, giving off an odorous effluvium unlike anything Chid had ever smelled—sweat, boot-dressing, cooking food, corn mush, and wet wool. It was different from the homy smell of a ship's steerage or forecastle, lacking the sharp tang of oakum or tar to temper the raw smells.

"You boys'll have to eat light," a red-whiskered sergeant grinned, herding them to a long trestle table. "We don't get what we requisition for at this post by a long shot, not gun nor food nor powder nor anythin'. But you'll wish you had even this much where you boys are headed for."

"Shet up an' bring on the grub," Paph North growled. "We'll be under Navy requisitions."

"Yeanh! You sure will. That's why I was feelin' sorry for you. What Navy stuff come through this post damn' seldom gets to Presque Isle. It don't even stay here. Ain't you heard about Chauncey's museum?"

"He's way east on Ontario, sojer."

"Oh, my! Well, his grubbin' fingers reach clear to here. He collects for his museum at Sackett's Harbor, shipbuilders, sailors, grub, guns, navy supplies; cripes! It's a storehouse. He never uses nuthin'; jest collects 'em an' to hell with whoever needs the stuff. Chauncey's boss on all the lakes."

"Perry's commander on Erie; soon's he gets here."

"Mebbe so. But he better outrank Chauncey good an' plenty if he wants supplies 'way to his camp. Listen, mister, Chauncey's so jealous o' supplies and stores an' reserves he's fretted hisself inter the stomach heaves grabbin' on to 'em. They say he jest sits making rousers at a turrible rate an' counts his supplies. No mortal ever heard o' him fightin', anyway. You ask Elliot or Dobbins, they know. You'll be goin' down the lake with Cap Dobbins."

"When?"

"Why, right off. Soon's you eat. You stay here, Chauncey'd have you on his lake by mornin'."

Mr. Brown, Moses Leet, and a foreman, George Carmody, from the New Jersey contingent, were absent, having been invited to mess with the post officers and have a conference at the same time.

Chid didn't think much of the navy base. It was more than a mile removed from the barracks and at least thirty from the main army encampment. Directly across the river, dark against the snow, lay Fort Erie and the British guns. Fort Erie controlled the lake outlet. This was the chief reason that the President had ordered the new naval station to be located at Presque Isle, ninety miles down the lake. Erie could drop mortar shot right into Black Rock and had whenever her gunners wanted a little fun with the Americans.

"You should have been here last fall," the sergeant told Chid and his mess neighbors. "Lieutenant Elliot, he snuck over to the British side in a couple o' arks and took a brig from 'em, slick's skinnin' a sarpint. He burnt another; you could see her bones was you to be here by daylight. If the British had them two ships yet they'd never let you get down Erie tonight. You can thank Jesse Elliot. He's all right, boys, an' lots here don't think he's gettin' a square deal, havin' this man Perry come in as head. There's too much politics in this hull frontier."

"I reckon maybe the gov'mint thinks Perry a better man."

"Do you know him, Mister?"

"No. I saw him once, though; so did Chid here. I'd say your man Elliot had to be powerful good to be better'n Perry."

"Perry ain't done anythin' special in this war, I heard."

"No; we got politics on the seacoast too, sojer. It ain't his fault. Wait'll you see him. He kind o' charms you, you let him."

"Well, no navy man'd charm no army man I ever hear'n tell of. But he better charm somebody right proper if he wants to get some boats built. You want to sign a petition to keep Elliot commander o' the Erie fleet?"

"No."

"Well, it don't matter. The militia all signed an' so did some o' the lads down to Presque Isle. I jest wanted to get you started right, boys. How 'bout you, straw-hair?"

"No," Chid said, "I'm started right. I was a couple of times. It's the way I end up that bothers."

"Jesus! You talk like an old man, mister."

After supper, the drivers were called and paid off by a paymaster's clerk. The freight had been loaded into the hold of a small one-gun schooner which lay alongside a log bulkhead at the basin. Some of the men tried to sleep. The cooks scraped their pots and hung them on rafter pegs, in a row of copper suns. The barracks was becoming stifling hot, the stench strong and vile.

There was no rum at the post; and, tonight, no songs. It was a waiting time, and in it there was a vague apprehension. Chid had wanted to write to Mary; he had been thinking about it all day. But he made no effort to get at it. There was nothing to say save one thing, and it didn't seem right to put such a matter coldly down on paper. He would have liked to talk to Mary as he had to that girl of last night. Talking to her had given him a peculiar satisfaction. He had never before put into words some of the things of his mind and his heart. Doing so somehow sorted them out and let him think clearer. Some of the things which he had clung to and counted as important and essential became much less so when put into words.

He recalled, sitting here waiting, the long talks he used to have with Moses Leet. He owed a lot to them. They had kept his two feet firmly on

the ground and made his approach to his trade sane and real and proud. He thought that when Moses returned he would talk with him again as he used to. Only not about shipbuilding. Moses and Aunt Leety had made a good life of it. They knew the secret and had always stood for the kind of a family which Chid had wanted and pictured for himself.

Chid wondered if man could really toss over every dream and desire he had and still come out on top. This war, up here, was a close, terrible thing. He'd talked with men all along the Great Genesee Road and heard their bitter stories of brothers lost and houses burned, farms rotting and weed-grown because the men had gone off to fight. Sometimes he wished that he could answer his question on the basis of right or wrong. He suspected that he was wrong, as Nez had so outspokenly told him. But he couldn't forget other men who used the war and everything else they could to better themselves; Fish and Lefferts, gouty old Chauncey, perhaps even this young Lieutenant Elliot who permitted a petition of advantage to himself to be circulated. He was confused. Moses Leet could help him. All Chid needed was a reason, a good compelling reason to hold against that instinctive yardstick that he placed against almost everything.

Sylvester Tatro's cold was very bad. He was a lad of sixteen, slight of build and wiry; Nez's type, now a second-year apprentice. He hadn't eaten in two days. His eyes were dull and listless, and from deep in his chest came a frightening wheeze and rattle.

Chid made a poke of his stocking hat and filled it with hot floor sand which he heated in an iron kettle over the crane. He kept the sand bag on Sylvester's chest and back, as Aunt Leety had so often done for him. The boy slept after a while, quietly, his brow turned damp and cold.

Chid was just rolling him gently over, changing the sand bag, when Mr. Brown and the two foremen came in. A militia officer and Lieutenant Elliot, who was a sharp-eyed small man of perhaps twenty-five in an immaculate naval uniform, were with them. There was trouble on the faces of all of them.

"Boys," George Carmody said, "plans have changed. We shouldn't have picked up that Indian; he had a message from Chauncey. It kind of busts things up."

"What now, George?"

"Chauncey has ordered us to Sackett's Harbor."

"The hell you say! What in nation for?"

"Lieutenant Elliot says he always does, just to look us over an' keep the best for his own yard. Everything clears through him. The lieutenant here's furious, but he can't do anything about it."

"Well, damned if I came to this heathen country to go into a museum. I came to help the nation an', by Jesus, I will! My old woman'd be fit to ax; she livin' on her Pap again jest so's I could serve."

"Shut up, Art! You talk independent's a militiaman."

"Well, I'm a freeman, ain't I? I don't have to take no orders from gold braid."

"None o' us do. But, by snum, if we're sincere 'bout helpin' the nation we ought to do what they want us to. No matter what, we got to have a leader, seems if."

The men argued back and forth. Chid thought that it was their right to. After all, considered as a group, the shipbuilders were here as a result of patriotic appeal; they had been told that there was a vital job to be done and that no one in America could do it but themselves. "Museum pieces!" Paph North snorted. "Hah! I don't fancy tellin' my gran'childer 'bout this, I don't."

Noah Brown stood by the fire, his face black and clouded. It was not the first time that he had been hampered by petty military authority, and he thought often that the military had far too many personal stakes involved in making war decisions. Here was Isaac Chauncey, jealous of his rank, protecting his personal honor and his chances of advancement by robbing a neighboring base. On the other hand, the continued control of Lake Ontario was essential to the large effort. Brown's own loyalties were seriously challenged. By inclination he wanted to build Perry's fleet, to start out fresh and new, to create. To create had always been the greatest lure of his trade. But he could also understand the wisdom of authority, and he could understand, too, the rights of his shipbuilders to decide for themselves.

Nez came to Chid, talking close to his ear. "Sackett's Harbor's too civilized for us, Chid," he whispered.

Chid nodded. Sometimes he almost forgot about the trouble that hung over their heads. It was remote in miles and, somehow, in time, too.

"It would be reserve duty," Nez said. "Easy's sleepin'. Chid, you ain't thinkin' o' goin', are you?"

"No," Chid said. "I don't want to go there. Nez, Chauncey ain't our boss, is he?"

"Hell, no! Uncle Noah is, an' no one else, Chid. I'm with him, so long's it ain't Sackett's."

"It was what I was thinking, Nez," Chid said. "Come on, we'll put it up to him."

Mr. Brown was appreciative. He said that the men were free citizens and could do as they liked; even go home, as some of the men said they were going to. He didn't wholly blame any man; it was a stupid hard thing to whip men into a patriotic fervor, cart them four hundred miles into bitter winter and privation, and then tell them their sacrifice wasn't wanted after all.

"Nez an' I," Chid said, "are going to Presque Isle anyway. There'll be some others, too, I reckon, sir."

Mr. Brown said nothing. He looked at Chid with a new awareness. "You were such a cocky youngster down in Portersville," he said soberly. "What's come over you, Chidsy?"

"Nothing," Chid said.

But something had; Chid couldn't say what. He knew he wasn't going down to that remote base just to get away from his trouble. It was something more than that; something bigger and finer, which he did not understand. "I just want to, I guess," Chid muttered, and Nez clapped him on the back and said, "Chid, you're amazin'. Damned if you ain't!"

Chid and Nez went to the fireplace. Oddly, each knew what the other was doing, though neither had mentioned it. Chid climbed into his great-coat, the same which he had worn in the cemetery on the day Asa Tatum had been buried, still showing the burned patches from the stable fire which had killed Old Beemis.

He had come a long way since then, a long way in thinking and experience. He had tasted of the power of leadership. He put on his fire-warmed moccasins and eased their hardness by pacing the length of the room. His seabag was over his shoulder, his few belongings making a small flabby sack. He could feel the men watching him, feel the crystallization of their resolves flow about him and what he represented. It had

been so on the *Blessed Cause* when, by his own declarative act, he had started that mutiny which for both sides was a decision at last.

He stopped in front of Mr. Brown.

"Where's the boat that's to take us, sir?"

"Where you headin', Chid?" a man called.

"To Presque Isle, of course," Chid said easily. "It's where I agreed to go, ain't it? I'm working for Noah Brown, man, no one else."

"Well spoke, by God, Chid Alwyn! I'm with ye."

"Follow the path to the river," Mr. Brown said quietly.

"Aye, aye, sir," Chid said and crossed the room to the door.

Nez and Antoine were beside him, dressed for the night. Sylvester Tatro cried out from his blanket pallet and started to struggle into his outer clothing. Mr. Brown still stood at the fire. His face was no longer worried. More than half the men joined Chid at the slab door. With sudden determination Mr. Brown put on his fur coat and, taking up his writing folio and a large roll of linen-paper drawings, strode through the door and down the path to the boat basin.

Chid followed, Mr. Brown's words ringing in his ears. They were good words, warming and comforting, that Mr. Brown had spoken as he passed. "I could not have done it in the face of that order, Chid; it was up to the men themselves. I'm grateful to you, more than I can say right now." But it wasn't the words alone. It was the look in Mr. Brown's eyes and the sudden sincere pressure of his hand on his arm. It moved Chid strangely.

Twenty-nine men gathered on the snow-covered deck of the little gunboat. The others had elected to go home or take the easy berths at Sackett's Harbor, though nobody had said so outright, just reckoned they'd better follow orders. The militia officer was profane in his damnation of those with Chid and had threatened Mr. Brown with arrest; things that nobody took seriously. Elliot had been delighted, though he couldn't show it before either shipbuilders or his brother officers.

The sailors were sorting the tool boxes, putting back on shore those not claimed by the men on board. Sylvester Tatro had been carried below, tears streaming from his eyes when Mr. Brown said he might come. Moses Leet stood suddenly beside Chid, offering his hard horny hand.

"Good-by, Chid."

"Ain't you with us, Moses?"

"No, I'd like to be. But Noah asked me to take the other gang to Sackett's. I'm glad to do it; it saves his face somewhat an' God knows, Chid, Noah is needed at Presque Isle more'n any man on earth right now. I'll be seein' you soon again, Chidsy, soon's I can get back where I really belong." Moses hesitated in a curious pondering way, then suddenly looked directly into Chid's face. "Chid," he said, "that was the *Blessed Cause* off in the river that mornin', wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Chid.

"Did you come from her?"

"Yes. She was a disappointment."

"I reckon so. I wasn't sure at first, but I'm glad you told me."

"I was meaning to, Moses. I was figuring to have a long talk with you, about a lot of things."

"You in trouble, Chid?"

"Some."

"Bad?"

"It might be. Does Mr. Brown know?"

"No; he don't know the schooner an' so didn't connect you with it. But Livy Bracket from Noank did an' told me so. Them Noank people is malicious gossip-mongers, Chid, an' they got minds can make up the wickedest lies with no truth to go by 'tall. I'm takin' Livy to Sackett's with me where he can't hurt you none."

"You're good, Moses," Chid said, meaning it sincerely. "You always have been... well, like my father was."

"I ain't good, Chid. We love you, that's all; me an' Lib an' Mary, too; like you was our blood. I ain't so old I don't recollect when I was young an' full o' ginger. It was times jest like these be; a war on an' all o' us lads still fightin' desperate for our individu'le plans. It got more confusin' all the time till one by one we had to give our private notions up an' combine to lick the thing which was hurtin' us all. Some never come 'round, an' we named 'em Tories an' traitors an' worse, an' some got kilt an' some got bitter, an' most o' us never did catch up with our own matters; but we created suthin' good an' beautiful, Chid. Liberty an' freedom; they ain't idle words. Not to us. They're real as rocks an' iron spikes an' life in your body. You couldn't figure on no future 'tall with-

out 'em. Your aims ain't no different than anybody else's, Chid; it's on'y that you're more stubborn than most in pursuin' 'em. That's why you got into trouble; that's why you'll get into more if you don't modify. But, boy, it 'pears to me you got yourself set in the right trace now."

"I'm going to serve out my full apprenticeship."

"It's a good start, Chid. Don't fret about your trouble. I'll keep Livy bowed down at Sackett's. That Navy man on the schooner hinted you ain't as guilty as might seem, an' was it peace times I'd say go an' get it all cleared up legal. But right now, there's a bigger job to do first."

"Up here," Chid said, "what you said about Perry having my heart as well as my labor kind of makes better sense, Moses. I can see where a soldier has to be armed with more than just a musket, and a shipwright with more than his tools. It sort of has me guessing."

"Be proud of it, boy. Don't question it; it's the good in you, like I say you got. Chid, I got to leave now; Dobbins is makin' signs o' sailin'. Good-by, my boy; good-by, Chid."

"By," Chid said, "an', Moses, come back. Mr. Brown needs you more than any of us."

"Yes an' no," Moses said slowly. "I got some other ideas, an' I told him o' them. Chid, when he speaks with you, listen sharp. I don't know but what it'll set better with you than all this talk o' ours. Chid, good-by."

A sailor made the rounds of the cluttered deck, picking his way with that springy tread of the seasoned mariner. A deep-water man, thought Chid, and the only one I've noticed in this country so far.

"No lights or talk, gents," the sailor said as he reached the shipbuilders, standing in a group amidships. "You don't want a farewell broadside from Erie, do you?"

"Goddamned if I care," a New York man scowled. "The British might run this country better'n you roosters up here are doin' it."

"Mister," the sailor quietly said, standing very still, "I'm twenty years in this nation's Navy. Was I a plain civilian, I'd hammer you one for that."

"Just try it!"

Chid felt a sudden desire to hit the New York man. He'd never before wanted to, not for this offense, anyway. He might have, had not Lieu-

tenant Elliot sharply called for silence. The man slunk away in the darkness, dropping below to the cabin.

The warps were drawn on board. The pilot dumped his pipe overside and took his station at the tiller. Captain Dobbins ordered his men to the low bulwarks, each with a long sweep reaching into the black waters of the basin. Fort Erie was a silent blur against the snow-sheeted hills across the Niagara, outlined faintly by the greenish glow which commenced the nightly display of the Borealis.

"Give way together! Handsome, boys...like Perry hisself was here. Pull for him, lads; for Perry, a Navy man an' a gentleman...Jesus Christ, how this damn Navy up here needs him!"

The gunboat moved silently into the river. Not an oar squeaked; not a man missed stroke. Erie remained a sleeping watchdog only a fair musket shot away.

In the open lake the vessel spread her dark sails and reached down Erie shore to Presque Isle. She wasn't much of a ship; forty tons and jerry-built. But Chid, feeling the life of her trembling through the deck into his own body, smiled with a strange comfort. There would be real ships for Erie now, great proud ships, built by shipbuilders and manned by deep-water men, commanded by a Navy man and a gentleman. And he'd help to build them.

Through all the confusion of his mind and the staggering experiences of these weeks, that stood out with sudden satisfaction and promise. To build ships; to feel the good feel of smooth, ash-handled tools once again, with his own hands to make wood become useful and beautiful...to smell all the good smells of a good ship building. It was something real and understandable, a new, fresh start.

His big mistake had been ever to get away from it. It was what had been wrong with that horrible voyage on the *Blessed Cause*. He was a stranger to her kind of a ship and her kind of people. That was what had licked him; not understanding her. A man couldn't be licked by something that he knew.

Chid faced the black night off the bow, the cold wind biting on his right side. Ahead was Presque Isle, about as remote and distant a place as a coastal man could think of. There was danger there, and intrigue, and inefficiency and an almost hopeless job to be done. But that job was ship-

building; shipbuilding was the foundation of the place, and if a man knew the foundation, loved it and understood it, no framework could ever be built on it that would confuse or baffle him. He could measure and weigh things then, good or bad, because he knew the scale to the measure.

Chid went below feeling a personal new peace and hope. He couldn't help feeling that he had someplace along the road gained some freedom. He couldn't define it, or put his finger on it. Everything was the same; he was still an apprentice with time to serve, he was in trouble, his dreams had not been advanced one iota. But, nevertheless, Chid felt better, inside, than he had in weeks.

It was long after ten o'clock, but the men still lounged on their seabags under a swaying candle lantern in the low creaking hold. Sylvester alone slept, rolled in blankets, in a hammock triced between the heel of the foremast and a bulkhead which separated the compartment from the rude after-trunk cabin.

They were guessing riddles, roaring at the stupid answers of some. The New England men held up well, Chid noticed. They studied the questions soberly, and if they answered at all it was to give a smart answer or the right one. Moses Leet had taken Livy Bracket and five other New England men with him. Four men had gone back over the Great Road, disgusted and sick of their choice. Five of the New England men remaining in the Presque Isle party were apprentices: Sylvester, Bob Crown, Culver Coons, Tonk Slinker, and Chid. The rest were journeymen, big lumbering Paph North, who reminded Chid somewhat of Alec Drake; Honest Huntley, Tatum's best calker; the five other Connecticut men, and Nez. Nez didn't rate as anything. He had at one time or another done about everything in the Tatum yard, not particularly well unless he wanted to win a bet or have something to boast about. Moses Leet used to call him the best striker he ever knew, though. Put a man with Nez, and first thing you knew Nez, the helper, had his team-mate working twice as hard just to keep up with him.

Antoine belonged to neither the New York, the Jersey, nor the Tatum gang. He was a logger, strange to the talk and ways of salt-coast shipbuilders. His wound had been painful, and Chid could only guess how

he had suffered with it in silence. But tonight, like the rest, he was bright and chipper as if this last link in the long journey was for him, too, a beginning of something new and fresh.

"Now, you take two ships, a hundert miles apart, sailing smack again' each other. One sails six miles the hour; t'other sails four—how many hours a'fore they meet?"

"Cripes! A man cain't do that in his head!"

"Well, figure it any way you want to. I got a shilling sez you don't do it right in two minutes."

"Here's my shilling, damn it! It ain't no harder'n figurin' some o' the mold plans I been up against."

The schooner made comfortable noises, striding into the night. The hold was warm with cozy body-warmth, and the candle in the lantern was fat and bright. From aft came the low murmur of voices; Mr. Brown and George Carmody were in the cabin making their plans. The tiller creaked slowly as the pilot met the short lake seas. Chid couldn't think of a thing more important to do than to solve that riddle. He didn't need to figure it any place but in his head. A shilling was a good stake, making his brain suddenly sharp and clear.

"Ten hours," Chid said. "Ten hours even."

"Damn you, Con-e-teecut! That's correck, blow me, 'tis!"

Chid pocketed the money with satisfaction. He had earned it. He had had plenty of money lately, but he couldn't recall when he had earned any. There was something different about this.

"Obliged to you," Chid said. "Now, I got one for you boys."

He rummaged in his breeks-pocket, and drew out eight iron nails. He spread them out on his left palm, showing them to the men. "How many nails are there?" Chid asked.

"You're sly, feller! I ain't bettin' on that one."

"Come on. A dollar you don't call it right."

"Saints! It's like takin' candy from a gossoon. I got wits, me b'y, an' they're better'n eyes right now. There's thuteen nails there; eight irun ones an' five on your blasted fingers!"

"Nope, that ain't right, mister," Chid said.

"Ho! I can see, cain't I? How many do you say?"

"Fifteen," Chid said.

"Yer moon mad, complete. Eight an' five is thuteen any day."

"Listen," Chid said, saying it just right, "will you give me a dollar if I'm wrong?"

"Sure I will, b'y!"

"All right," Chid said, "give over. I'm wrong."

"Well, be Gaisus! Hoodwinked! An' by a buckeen easter, too!"

The roar of laughter was good to hear. Chid pocketed the money. "You got to lay the word dollar in good and heavy," Chid pointed out. "Kind of accent it to keep the man's mind away from the real meaning. He'll fall for it every time. Mister, I'll give you back your money, you want."

"By the Holy Mither, no! I learnt a dollar's worth, b'y."

Chid had two dollars now. Curiously, he didn't feel quite right about the second one. He'd tricked it to him, not earned it. But there was no sense pressing it on a man if he didn't want it. It was still a dollar and right spendable.

The low door in the after-bulkhead opened, and George Carmody poked his shaggy head into the hold. "Where's Chid Alwyn?" he asked.

"Here."

"Mr. Brown an' me want to see you. Aft here, boy."

Chid went into the cabin. Mr. Brown and Carmody sat at a swinging table, papers strewn before them. Lieutenant Elliot dozed in a quarter-berth along the sheathing, his uniform neatly folded on a sea chest. Mr. Brown's seegar gave off thin gray smoke. He smokes a raft of them, Chid thought, waiting for him to speak. I wonder if he's got enough to last him up here in the wilderness?

"This upset has raised hob with our work schedules," Noah Brown said in his direct way. "We've got to lay out some new ones."

"Yes, sir."

"We need at least a hundred shipbuilders," Carmody said. "We round up forty, and twenty-nine get where we need 'em."

"What's the matter with the gov'mint, anyway?"

"It ain't the gov'mint, Alwyn. It's some of the men that have sworn to serve it. We got to build a fleet in spite of them. Boy, we need a foreman."

"I'm not a foreman," Chid said. "I'm not even a journeyman."

"I wasn't till I tried," Carmody said. "Today I'll build you a forty-four from a half-model and the boss's go-ahead."

"Someday I want to, too," Chid said.

"Chidsy," Mr. Brown said, "we've got to build ships in a way that they've never been built before; fast, of green wood, and with poor and little help. I've told you these things before. Now, I don't want a man that knows how to build ships too well. He'd have too much to unlearn. You've got the fundamentals; I saw your ability to lead an hour ago—and you've got some unique ideas, according to Moses Leet. He never approved of them much, Chidsy, but he was fair to say they'd come in handy for this job. We talked it all over back in Portersville, but I wasn't sure about you then. You had some unique ideas about other things, too."

"What ideas?"

"Why, about money and serving out your time and such. And, well, this thing we call patriotism, Chidsy. What you did tonight at Black Rock changed all that. It just took one man with courage and right-thinking like that to sway the rest; I couldn't have ordered it, you understand. It's the kind of thinking, the kind of loyalty and patriotism we need up here even more than shipbuilding talent."

"Won't Chauncey raise ructions?"

"Loud, he will," Carmody nodded grimly. "But it don't matter. The boys all came here as free citizens. Mr. Brown an' me have ships to build; you're here and we hire you, that's all."

"Hire?" Chid asked.

"Yes, Chidsy," Mr. Brown said. "I think you'd be worth pay for the extra work. I'd want you to take over the New England men and finish off one of the three gunboats now building. You'd be boss of that hull, free to use those short cuts Moses spoke about."

"What happens in August?"

"In August you're free. If you want to be."

"I've looked forward to it for five years," Chid said. "I'll want to be, all right."

"Then it's settled?"

"Well—"

"The pay is, say, ten a month."

"I wasn't thinking of that, Mr. Brown," Chid said, and it felt odd,

hearing himself say that. "I was wondering if a man might put together one of those steamboats for fighting. Seems to me— "

"Now, Chidsy," Mr. Brown said, his eyes twinkling, "we don't want our ideas too unique."

"I reckon not, sir. But someday I want to build one."

"So do I," Noah Brown said warmly, "but first we've got to win this war. It takes a free country to invent and develop such things, Chidsy. We've got to keep it free right now; there's no time for anything else until that's done."

"I can see it," Chid said. "I can see it more all the time."

George Carmody handed Chid a packet of drawings. They were labeled "Gunboat Number 3; Lake Erie Fleet." Chid took them to the lantern in the hold. He studied them all night, in a small, tight, pleasant world apart from the snores and tossings of the shipwrights. He reckoned, come launching, she'd be about the best ship a man had ever built. And burned into her stem post, by an ancient right, would be the initials CA—those of her master-builder.

Chapter Ten

FROM THE TINY slabwood shanty which was to be Chid's home and office for many months, he could, looking through the north sash, see the harbor of Presque Isle. It was a broad flat bay, almost landlocked by a long sprawling peninsula which extended from the mainland hookwise to the northeast. From its tip, where a stone watchtower stood, the water distance to the shore was less than a mile. At first he hadn't considered it a very safe harbor. A good-sized attacking fleet could easily stand into the bay in battle line, and it seemed entirely open to the violent north and northeast gales. But that was before he knew about the bar.

The real protection of the naval basin was the bar. It extended from the peninsula to the eastern shore—a submerged sandy barrier only five feet under the rippling waters, and there was but one deep channel over it. The channel was, at this time of year, about twelve feet deep. Dobbins, who held the naval rating of sailing master, and a few others alone know its ranges. On the day that Chid arrived, still heady with the plans which he had studied all through the night, Dobbins had almost missed the channel. Chid had seen, like a sheer yellow wall alongside, the shadowy edges of the submerged cliffs. But the gunboat had slithered through and without touching rounded to a mooring in the deep, quiet waters of the bay itself.

From that hour on Chid worked as hard and as long as he ever had in his life. Only at noon, when the yard closed down for fifteen minutes and Chid and his mates climbed the steep snow-covered bank to the rude cookshed on the plain above the lake, was there any respite from the long laboring day.

He could watch the building of the schooners from the window of his shack. There were three of them slowly taking form, ranged on paral-

lel ways on the broad iced beach beside a clear stream called Lee's Run. To the westward a few hundred yards, at the mouth of Cascade Creek, Dobbins' country carpenters had built two rugged launching ways. The heavy brigs which were to be built there were still pathetically small piles of green timber at the ways head. George Carmody was in charge of them.

Chid's gunboat was to be named the *Ariel*. She consisted now of only a long hand-hewn keel, a curved stem piece, and the predictions of Orlando Hog, a fat, dour man from Bath.

"Y'understand, Mr. Alwyn," Hog told Chid, watching the retreating figure of Noah Brown, "I didn't want to say nuthin' in front o' the boss. But they's trouble with this here boat; bad, bad trouble. I done the best I could so far."

"What kind of trouble, Mr. Hog?"

Mr. Hog slid his mittened hands into his leather apron belt.

"The plans," he said in a sly whisper. "Whoever made 'em don't know boats. Jest don't know 'em, Mr. Alwyn. I've built arks an' I've built flat-boats, ten o' them at least, sir, an' I ought to know. But these here plans call for the bottoms o' this boat to be curved; round, like a barrel. Now, ain't that suthin'?"

"It can be done, Mr. Hog," Chid said, not laughing. "Real shipbuilders can build round bottoms as easily as flat bottoms. Have you ever been down to the coast?"

"Durn correck, I have. Way down to Baltimore. But I didn't look particular at no boats there. You see, then I was a teamster an' not interested. You mean to hint boats on the coast is round-bottom?"

"All of them, Mr. Hog. It means every piece of timber has to be selected to fit the exact shape it's to take and then worked by hand. Of course, plank and such we can steam to shape."

"Well, I'll be damned! Maybe them plans ain't so crazy, heh? John Shallus's sawmill down to Waterford is cuttin' out timber. I give him orders just like's if 'twas for a house or a barn. I declare! You know, Mr. Alwyn, I was a bit sore when Noah Brown says you're to be in charge. Dunno now but what he done me a favor, sort of. What you want me to do, Mr. Alwyn?"

"Well, sharpen up your tools, Mr. Hog. It'll give me time to get ahold

of things. Have some of the boys move those planks around to north'ard; they'll make some protection from the wind and speed things up. Take my apprentices and set them to whittling trunnels the while. We've got to be forehanded, kind of plan ahead of the men."

"That's all right if you know what you're doin', Mr. Alwyn."

"I reckon I do, Mr. Hog. A ship is only wood and iron—and maybe brains."

"Not up here, it ain't," Hog grinned sourly. "It's fightin' for tools an' stock an' time an' keepin' your fingers crossed that them goddamn' contractors down to Pittsburgh send what the Navy men say they're to send. An' you alwus got to hide your choice stuff lessen one o' Chauncey's boys come by an' requisitions it."

"I reckon you and I can lick that, we try hard."

"I reckon! Mr. Alwyn, every spike I drive into this here boat is like stabbin' an Injun to me. Two o' my relations is buried up on yonder bank. They came last year, to fell trees an' get the yard ready, but they never got away."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hog. But it'll make you a good workman, I reckon."

"Good! By Christ, Mr. Alwyn, the best. One was my own brother."

The place already looked like a shipyard. Thousands of fitch-sawn planks lay stacked and air-drying, piled so they looked like the wigwams of the Indian winter camp which Chid had seen on the River Mohawk. Underfoot the chips and shavings made a soiled deep carpet over the crusted snow. The busy forge of the only blacksmith at Presque Isle smoked near the Cascade yard, and the anvil clanged cheerily in the thin raw air. An oxen team crept from the dense forest which skirted the shore along the edge of the clay bank and behind it snaked a stout, trimmed oak log. Antoine rode the log, his red woolen cap bright against the snow and his rich nasal voice raised in a French logger's lay.

Chid loved it. It was, in a sense, home. He understood this place. It was friendly and warm. Its challenge did not scare him, and he faced its problems boldly and with confidence. What had to be licked was not sinister or evil. What had to be licked could be licked by courage and faith and sweat and hard labor and brains. He felt keenly, those first days, the goodness and the importance of what he was doing. He remembered often Nez's sober words as they lay concealed beneath the tarpaulin

beside the boiler of the *Firefly*. Nez had felt the magic of Noah Brown's great shipyard of the East River. It had made them both feel as if their hands and wits had at last touched something understandable in the midst of their black troubles. "I want to catch up with that feelin' again," Nez had said. "I want to go to Presque Isle an' work like hell an' feel with the good folks o' this nation." That was it; being counted, if only by yourself, with the good people, with Noah Brown and faithful tireless Dan Dobbins and Real Taylor, the naval rating in command of Presque Isle's meager defenses, and with Captain Perry, with all these ship-builders who had sacrificed and come to this bitter, remote post.

Chid found himself often gazing through the sash of the shanty in fascination at what was being accomplished. His *Ariel* was the least advanced of the three schooners at the Lee's Run yard. The other two were already well in frame, growing ribs each hour. He wondered often how so much progress had been made. No supplies of any kind reached the winter-bound station. Supplies—tools and spikes and iron and fittings—had all been ordered. But nothing came north from Pittsburgh; nothing but an occasional dispatch bearer from Washington demanding more speed. Nez, whom Mr. Brown had appointed a forager, spent his days in the countryside beyond the near-by town of Erie searching for food and milk, for clothing and medicines, for anything that he could borrow, buy, or steal in the sparsely settled region south of the lake. Antoine, cheerful and tireless now that his wound had healed and he had ceased his eternal blood-letting, took charge of the timber-cutting. His time was spent in the forest, searching out the oak and pine and chestnut and larch the builders required. He worked always with paper patterns in hand, exact tracings of the crook or knee required; and the measurements were not indicated by numerals but by ax-handle lengths, for Antoine, like Nez, could not read.

Noah Brown, after his first survey, plodding slowly over the snow with his assembled foremen, had become more depressed at each step. He had spent the entire afternoon writing letters demanding material and men to Commodore Chauncey, to Congress, to the President, and a long sad report to Captain Perry, still on the coast gathering the force of seamen and gunners for these ships yet unbuilt.

It was almost dark when he sealed the last letter. Chid, coming to

warm himself and to demand his share of the few spikes available, watched him with sympathy. On this quiet man's shoulders were all the problems and worries and heartaches of not one but five ships.

"Nez and two Tuscaroras are reported on the road, Mr. Brown," Chid said.

"Let's hope it's beef at last," Mr. Brown said quietly. "How are your men taking the short rations, Chid?"

"Good. They're used to it, I guess. If they growl I set 'em a double-hard job."

Mr. Brown smiled. "A man can't work if he doesn't eat, Chid. Let's see what Nott brought in. He's a great lad, Chid. It gives me heart just to hear him take an order. Never a gripe, never a scowl. I am indebted to you for fetching him along."

Nez and the two Indians were pushing through the snow ruts in the path outside. Each Indian led a horse dragging a *travois*. The loads were heavy, swaying under their hide covering.

"What you got, Nez?" a workman called, leaning on his adze.

"Gals," Nez cried. "Prime gals, bound an' gagged an' not touched by no man yet! You boys keep to your work. I ain't tradin'."

"You can have 'em, Nez!"

"Christ, Nez! Whyn't you fetch fodder? Gals—hah!" a man from the *Ariel* snorted.

"These gals is extry special, Davey. They can split logs an' do chores an' set a man so to ease he thinks he's in Jemmy Madison's Congress. Wait'll you see."

Nez's load was a horse-operated pit saw. He had discovered it near a mill site in the Donation Lands along the road south to Waterford. It was rusty and the beam was dozy and cracked, but it would save hours of laborious sawing with the two-man plank saws.

"No beef, then, I take it, Nott?" Mr. Brown inquired.

"No, sir. I got two milk cows located, though. But this seemed kind of essentialer."

"It almost is, I swear. But we must have some beef soon."

"Tomorrow," Nez promised. "Mr. Brinkerhoff wants twenty dollars a head. That's plain robbery. You say the word, Uncle Noah, an' they won't cost you a copper."

"No," Mr. Brown laughed. "I guess you had better pay for them. We've enemies enough to the north and the west without rousing our own countrymen against us."

Nez looked ruefully at his snowshoes. "It would've been more fun, jest spookin' 'em off. It gets me sore, everybody raisin' prices the minute I heave in sight. You'd think they'd catch on that this hull fleet's bein' built jest to protect 'em, wouldn't you?"

Noah Brown did not answer. It was but one more proof to him of the general indifference of the entire nation to the war effort along the northern border. It was as if the nation, led by Congress itself, had abandoned this place which alone could stave off the invasion from the north. The British were known to be preparing a formidable fleet across the lake with which to open and protect a permanent supply line to their army which had captured Detroit. If they succeeded, if these five small vessels which he must complete and arm and man in such a short period failed, then the nation must be cut in two; then America must face blockade from the west by land as well by sea from the east. Already he had word of the great nineteen-gun *Detroit*, in frame at Malden, in Canada, and of the building of her supporting gunboats along the northern shore of Erie. It was for him a shipbuilder's race. He dispatched his letters by Indian runners with a feeling of discouragement. It was so difficult to make those far-off men, secure in their warm homes, understand that their canvas and cordage and copper and guns and blocks were needed now, that no navy in God's world could hold Erie unless it first had ships.

"I need iron for to hang my rudder," Chid said, "and oakum any day now."

"You know the state of the storehouse," Mr. Brown said wearily. "I'm expecting stores of all kinds daily. Somehow, they just don't seem to get here, Chid."

"I guess I understand," Chid said. "Maybe some of those short cuts you mentioned would come in handy about now."

"Perhaps they would, Chid. I leave it up to you."

It added an extra problem to the building of the schooner, but Chid attacked it with a savage glee. Somehow it made the vessel even more his own, this necessity to fight for material as well as time and loyalty and

courage. The *Ariel*, though she had commenced to grow only weeks after her two sister ships were recognizable as ships, was not far behind them. Licking them, beating the time of his rival foremen, gave him a fierce delight. His gang, led by Paph North and the willing but clumsy Mr. Hog, caught his spirit and made a race of it. By the end of the month the *Ariel* was planked. Her clean pine deck was laid, with the exception of a curious circular well amidships which had the other foremen guessing. The well did not appear in the plans. It was partly Chid's own notion. The butt blocks were being fastened and doublings for the rigger's fittings morticed into the strong oak frame members. Overside, in the lee of the hull, where the sun beat warmer each day, Tonk Slinker and Culver Coons, working under the keen eye of Honest Huntley, roughed out the spars from tall, straight pine logs.

It was a month which Chid never forgot. Dog-tired and hungry as he was most of the time, he could always turn to the *Ariel* and draw more strength and resolve from her. He never tired of watching her grow, watching her hourly become prouder and braver and lovelier. One day in mid-month Captain Perry arrived from Sackett's Harbor. Chid did not see him for several weeks. He did not particularly need to or want to. He could draw all the courage he needed from the *Ariel*, from the men who labored beside him from dawn to flare-lighted night.

By the first days of April he reckoned he was ready to launch. He still needed the oakum and rudder iron. But with luck, he'd beat those other two boats by a week. After that he knew what he wanted to do, though he hadn't worked up the courage to mention it to Mr. Brown yet.

The shanty was a pleasant place; warm now, even without the constant bucket of live charcoals from the forge under the board table on which Chid did his laying out. Flies buzzed at the sash; already a man could swat mosquitoes outside, get in practice for the swarms that the natives promised by May when the lake began to fall, and, in the lee of the material piles and the hulls of the ships themselves, new grass, pale and yellow and short, sprouted from the mud.

Chid carved at a wooden model, whittling with his familiar third-round gouge the soft, silky pine block. Next to drawing, which Chid

was only beginning to be handy at, there was nothing like a model to show a man how something was to be made.

He reached to a peg above the door frame and took down a cowhorn which Antoine had made for him. It was part of the system, the time-saving system, of which Chid was so proud. He blew it twice. Twice was for Paph North at the last of the decking.

Paph looked at the model and shrugged. "I dunno, Chid," he said, "I think— What in hell is it, boy?"

"A revolving gun platform. Paph, you built one on that navy boat Asa Tatum did last year. This is an improvement on it."

"Not me, I didn't, Chid. I wasn't on that hull. How's it work?"

Chid showed him, explaining the model. It looked like a flat wooden wheel on a pivot, supporting a wheelless gun carriage. North wasn't impressed, though he'd learned not to disagree with this youngster who was his boss. Chid didn't take kindly to disagreement, especially when it came to not agreeing with one of his new ideas. But Paph had to admit to himself that without some of those ideas the *Ariel* would still be a wooden skeleton instead of the most advanced vessel in the yard.

"We sink it in the deck amidships," Chid said, his eyes gleaming. "Stick a couple of iron straps on the edges and turn her with a pair of capstan bars. It's six times as fast as swinging and aiming a carriage gun."

"Where'll you get the iron?" snorted North.

"Well...make wooden straps, Paph."

"Cripes! Them boats ain't nuthin' but wood; you'll be calkin' 'em tight with wood and riggin' 'em with wood yet."

"We'll get supplies, any day now," Chid said, wondering how many times they had all said that. "Paph, take Bob down and get at this thing."

"I ain't finished matchin' to the king plank for'ard."

"Never mind. Honest and I will do that under flares tonight. You do this."

"All right," Paph said dubiously. "But I think you'll shoot the masts outen your own boat with this contraption."

"Not if you make it like the model. See—it's off the fore-and-aft center line. You can shoot fair ahead or fair astern, and no gunboat'd be fool enough to show his broadsides to an enemy."

"Well, that's different." Paph shrugged. "Chid, how in nation are we

goin' to get this fleet ready, anyhow? God, I need everything you can mention. Brown hollers an' Elliot hollers an' you holler—iron, spikes, paint, blocks, rope; anything your bloody plans say! But them things just ain't here, Chid. They're in Chauncey's museum, or on the way, or jest ordered!"

"Brown and Perry are down to the Pennsylvania towns now, trying to open a supply line from there. It's been bad, having everything clear through Sackett's Harbor; it leaves us only wood to work with," Chid said.

"Cripes! The Pennsylvania towns ain't far enough. Washington, that's where they ought to head. Right to Congress or somebody who'd give a continental for us up here."

"We're getting some stuff from Black Rock, any time now. Dan Dobbins went after it in the sloop. More men are coming from Philadelphia."

"You got to show me," North growled. "I'm fair sick o' this chore. An' there's others, too. Them New Jersey fellers on the far brig's ready to quit."

"You can quit any time you want," Chid said, watching North.

"God in the mountains! I do, boy. Right now." North threw his calking mallet savagely on the floor and dusted his hands. "When's they a sloop boat leave east?"

"There ain't none, not that will take quitting shipbuilders, Paph. You'll have to leg it."

"Hunh! Through that Indian country south, alone? Not me."

"Well, maybe you better stay then, Paph," Chid grinned and handed him the mallet. "Nez and Antoine have some deer coming in, I hear from the cook."

"Venison!" Paph grunted and grinned sheepishly. "Chid, you're too smart for me."

Chid watched Paph resume his work on the gunboat. It wasn't venison nor fear of Indians that had sent North back to work. Chid couldn't say exactly what it was. He supposed most of the growling men, like Paph, just growled and never intended to make good on their threats. But if you drove them, tried to make them eat their words, they became suddenly stubborn and—proud, was it?—and really might quit. You had to

give them an out, a handle upon which to fix their rationalization. Like venison. Let them growl and sputter; then give them a handle. It was all part of shipbuilding, of foremanship.

But he must leave a note on the shingle or, better yet, find Nez at Stone's in the town and warn him that venison was expected. Paph North was a dullard and a sour man, but you couldn't lie to him.

Chid hated the guard duty. He felt that it wasn't his job. Right now he and Honest ought to be matching the last of the deck planking into that king piece. Really, he wanted to do that; his hands seemed always to itch for the feel of tools. It had been a hard job, selecting the right stock for the vital member, laying out the long oak plank and carefully figuring the exact angle of each stepped jog. But he'd done it, studying the thing over all of one night and giving the paper pattern to Honest Huntley the next morning with keen satisfaction and pride. He'd forgotten that he had guard mount when he'd told North he would complete that job tonight.

Chid finished his flip. Duncan's Erie Hotel was crowded tonight as always. Mr. Stone, who had bought the place cheap from Duncan when the war had scared him away, had done a fine business ever since the shipbuilders had arrived. Three days ago Sailing-master Taylor had brought eighteen thirsty sailors into town; more carpenters were expected daily; and sometimes the patrol gunboat, from Black Rock, lay in overnight and gave her men liberty. Duncan's was the gathering place for them all, and Stone didn't give a care whether the Erie civilians patronized him or not.

"We got some extry good Jamaica came up today, mister," Stone mentioned to Chid. "You want to give it a try?"

"No," Chid said, "I got to go on sentry duty in twenty minutes."

"A waste o' time, mister. A damned waste o' time. That's Taylor's idea—guardin' the place from a few drunk Injuns. If the British come, it'll be by the lake, an' we'll all have time to skedaddle south. Whyn't you tell Taylor to go scratch hisself?"

"I can't. I'm still an apprentice, and Brown posted orders for us. Listen, how can you get all the rum you want up from the coast while we can't even get a keg of spikes through?"

"Why, hell, up the Allegany, the Connewango; then French Creek an' carry to the Erie shore. Nuthin' to it till the water gets low in the fall. Your trouble is at tuther end; you ain't got the suppliers back o' you like I have."

Chid agreed bitterly and paid his score. He was still spending from the first dollar he had won from the carpenter coming up from Black Rock on the navy schooner. He was saving his wages against the time of his freedom. About the first thing he'd need then would be some money.

Chid walked to the sentry house south of the closely huddled village, sloshing through the thawing mud. To the northwest he could see the dancing orange flares of the Cascade shipyard. Work proceeded there until far into the night. Some of the men, like himself, simply worked until they dropped. Counting in the men they had found at work, there were still only fifty-five carpenters. Chid felt a constant amazement at the amount of work that they had accomplished.

Peepers were singing in the swale ponds, becoming silent as he approached. Their song reminded him of calking mallets, pounding musically on a raw hull. Right now such music should be coming from the yards. It would be, once that long-delayed oakum arrived. Thinking about that stupid delay could make Chid mad any time.

Sailing-master Real Taylor was captain of the guard. He was about Chid's own age, a serious, sober chap who seldom smiled. Knowing him was the only pleasant thing about the irksome guard duty which was his for four hours every fifth night. Real Taylor was one of Perry's junior officers, trained at the Newport station. He and two other officers had brought one hundred and forty deep-water tars from there; experienced sailors and gunners and firemen and pikemen. But Chauncey had kept all but eighteen and sent him on to Presque Isle.

"Evenin', Real," Chid said, entering the log sentry post.

"Hello, Chid. I had word you fellows weren't coming up."

"From who?"

"Carmody. He said the Cascade yard men had kicked; it was the government's job to guard the place. The deuce of it is, he's right."

"Any of the *Ariel* men refuse?"

Real consulted his watch schedule and shook his head.

"No. There's none on tonight. Tomorrow night North from eight to twelve, and your Canuck from midnight to four."

"The Canuck's in the woods, trying to find me some larch for stanchion braces. Don't count on him, Real. If North don't show up, let me know. I can boss my own gang at least."

"I wish I could count on all you foremen like that, Chid. And the civilians. They're the worst. Perry was mad as a hurt she-bear when he found this place unguarded. He gave me the job of organizing a civil guard. I've got six men, but they're usually drunk as owls. I don't like to have to call on your chaps, but I can't do different."

"It's all right by me," Chid said.

Chid had found a certain satisfaction in the idle four hours of the duty, however. The nights were now balmy and starlit, and it gave him a chance to think clearly. Sometimes, in the rush of work on the *Ariel*, a whole day would speed by and, tired as a fox-run hound dog at night, Chid would realize that his thoughts that day had not once been on himself or his problems. On sentry duty, propped against a tree or nestled into a bough windbreak, he had time to clear his mind. But even then it did not always work. Often his thoughts went back to the *Ariel* and to the short cuts he planned for her.

"Where'll I guard tonight?"

"Take the Le Boeuf Pike, at the Cobalt Rill ford, Chid. Don't hamper the civilians; they're only drunk. But check the Indians—half of them would be with the British if they could connect. Perry's afraid of an Indian organization behind us."

"Same signal?"

"Yes; two and one, quick's you can load."

The man that Chid relieved was a civilian, a slouching, loose-jointed tavern hanger-on, smelling now of stale whisky. He had a good fire going, right on the corduroy road, and mentioned that the bough bed to leeward of it was still warm from himself.

"You oughtn't to make a fire there," Chid said. "Somebody built that road."

The man laughed, showing brown tobacco-stained teeth.

"Hell's fire, mister," he croaked. "You should talk. Think what they're

goin' to do to them ships you're buildin'. If that ain't waste, what is?"

"Anything happen on this post so far?"

"Nope. But they's goin' to. Two men will be along arter a while. They'll be wantin' to see you."

"What for?"

"Dunno, mister. I was to tell 'em when you was on a post they could reach 'thout bush-whackin'. Tonight you are. Be polite to 'em. Goo' night."

Chid kicked the fire over to the sod and stretched out on the cedar boughs. He wanted to think of a shipyard site that he had found on the bay inside the peninsula. It was a dandy; much better than even the navy-yard site on Cascade Creek. The shore shelved gently, and the hard shingle extended deep into a high, firm earth-and-stone bank. There was deep water a rod off shore. A man could build up to six large hulls there at a time. From the high bank he could, without a derrick, drop material right on deck, or step masts with a minimum of the man-handling which consumed so much time and energy in the usual yard. A gully to the east provided a natural road for teaming, and there was plenty of space where the bank curved closer to the shore for a forge, the sail and molding lofts, and the necessary shipyard outbuildings. With four or six stout stringers on A-bucks, from the bank to the hull, you could slide even such things as heavy iron boilers and steamboat machinery into a ship without much trouble.

It was funny the way his mind kept running to steamboats. He knew nothing about them and, until the voyage on the *Firefly*, had felt much as Antoine did about them. Down on the coast they were unknown, not being in any way fit for sea voyaging, though Mr. Fulton had one on Long Island Sound, and Chid had heard a fantastic tale of one running down the Jersey coast to the Delaware. But the *Firefly* had run well even in floe ice. Chid remembered her chuffing past the tied-up sloops, it seemed to him in chuckling triumph. She wasn't much different in build from the sailers which he knew so well; a mite of extra kneeing and frame-backing around the heavy steam plant and double bilge-stringers; that was all. He had, as he had watched the *Firefly's* revolving water wheels, seen several places where some thrust bracing would have been helpful. In New York Bay, when the steamboat had rolled,

lifting one paddle high, there had been a cruel twist to the hull. Chid would have liked the time to study it out, to devise a hog brace or a wrench keelson to eliminate that twist.

But a steamboat up on the lakes here—that was a different proposition than on the ocean. The seas were short and steep, and Chid doubted that they would build up to the giant ocean combers which could seize a steamboat by the water wheels and capsize her. He toyed with the idea, watching the flames lick at the hardwood slash of the sentry fire. It was not a new idea tonight. He had thought about it often at odd moments. But not completely; he had reached no conclusions.

Chid had been surprised entirely by the country he had come over. It was not as unsettled as he had imagined. The Genesee Country, for example, was only fifteen years old; yet there had been good settlements all the way to Geneva. Though he hadn't actually seen the village part of it, he understood that Black Rock was growing steadily. At New Amsterdam, passing through it in the sunset that night, there were plenty of houses, some of brick or stone. He'd seen a schoolhouse there, and a tight market section on a wide street called Schimmelpennick Avenue. A gossipy man had told him, as the horses were being watered, that New Amsterdam had been planned like Washington, and by the same man, a Frenchy named L'Enfant, with ninety-foot avenues radiating from a center, connected by streets sixty-six feet wide. There was agitation afoot to call the place the City of Buffalo, because the bison passed over the near-by traces in extensive herds to and from the salt licks at the Hepatic and Inflamable Springs to the northeast. The man had shown them a newspaper, of that day's date, called the Buffalo *Gazette*, to prove it. The trouble, though, he had admitted, was communications—roads and good water routes. It was the trouble with all the new towns round about, he said.

Presque Isle, too, was a surprise to Chid. Not that the place was any more than predicted. It was centered about an ancient ruined French fort and peopled by trappers and hunters and fishermen; a frontier society just beginning to think of itself as a permanent settlement. What surprised Chid was to find the place an outpost not of New York State, but of Pennsylvania and Maryland and Virginia. The village of Erie shopped to the south, not by way of the lake and New York on the coast.

All of Mr. Stone's rum and supplies came up from that way, by flat-boats and arks and teams. Mr. Brown and Captain Perry evidently had made the same mistake that Chid had—thought of the supply route the long way.

Someday, Chid reckoned, this lake country would be as open as the thickly settled seacoast or the Genesee lands; a stagecoach would run through three or four towns before changing horses. Lake Erie already had Buffalo and Detroit, though the British held that place now, and Black Rock was growing; there were some good settlements to the west and across the lake. Beyond Erie there were three other huge lakes. Thinking of this vast area as being settled from the south, not the east, left Chid with an odd feeling of promise. He toyed with that shipyard idea with a peculiar new hope.

It was an engaging notion, a trained shipwright starting a shipyard way up on a wilderness lake not yet settled. Building steamboats. On a lake they'd do all right, linking up those towns; perhaps, in time, drive sail away, as some people held they would do on the Hudson. Chid could almost see the yard, spread out before his eyes as if he viewed it from a great height. Behind the yard, on the bank, was a neat white dwelling house, under shade trees with a well-worn footpath to the lofts and ways on the shore. It was the first time that his dream had taken such definite shape, assumed location and dimension and detail. He found it a heady dream.

It would get him away from that trouble down at salt; or at least fend it off for a long time, perhaps forever. There would be no competition; not for years. It was a danged challenging idea worth thinking about some more, thought Chid comfortably. Of course, he'd have to have money, and somebody would have to wake up and drive these British back where they belonged.

Chid heard voices down the corduroy road coming from the south. He threw shredded bark on the fire for light and scrambled to his feet. Six men came out of the forest, shuffling along with the weary pace of far-travelers. They had sticks over their shoulders, and their bundled clothing hooked over them. Chid reckoned they were nipped; they sure sounded it.

"Who goes there?"

"A-r-r! Boys, I'd say we'd arruv. Who wants to know, mister?"

"Civil guard of Erie," Chid said, feeling silly. "I'm supposed to check on everybody going through."

"Well, go ahead an' check, sonny. You want a drap fust?"

"No, thanks. I just want to know who you fellers are and where you're going; that's all."

"Well, sir, this here is the right hon'able Sid Lomax, late baron o' lower Weehawken, heir to all the toads on Hackensack Plank road; a gempmen an' a Jersey man, sir. An' this here noble gent, what belches so constant, is none other than Prince Luddy White o' . . ."

"Quit it, mister. Are you the block-makers and riggers from Philadelphia?"

"Dammit, you guessed it, sonny."

"Where's the rest of you? Thirty are expected."

"Where, indeed? Well, I'll tell you. They're mostly still to Pittsburgh like we ought to be. Jesus, what a trip! No gals, no decent likkor nor pay nor consarn for us. Them as had sense enough to stay sober quit long ago."

"Mr. Brown expected you three weeks ago. Where you been?"

"Restin'; just restin' along the way. Travelin' time's on him, ain't it? Mister, where's Presque Isle at?"

"Just follow this road a piece," Chid said, feeling renewed disgust. "The flares'll be the shipyard. Ask for George Carmody; he's in charge right now. Where are your tools?"

"Hell, how should we know? We give 'em over to a flatboat man at Pittsburgh who said he'd bring 'em. You take yer job damn' serius, sonny."

"A-yep," Chid said with bitterness. "Damn' serious."

The six riggers lurched toward Erie, calling and hooting like rowdy boys at a barrel-burning. Of the seventy shipworkers promised from the coast since Chid's arrival, these six were the only ones to reach Erie. Isaac Chauncey had held onto some of them. But this contingent had been routed north directly to Presque Isle, not by way of New York State. Chid supposed that the real trouble lay deeper than Chauncey's selfishness; that it lay, too, in the inefficiency and disinterest of the politicians and the timid Navy Department. It was getting to be an old story, disheartening and discouraging. Chid wondered often how Captain

Perry, and Noah Brown, too, found the heart to drive ahead with the building and the naval plans.

Chid turned to thinking about the *Ariel* with relief. She was real and steady and solid, a physical object that would remain unchanged except to grow as he himself directed. He reckoned that he would send Antoine to scout up some casks in the farming country to the southeast and rig them in the crosstrees as he had on the *Blessed Cause*. Only there would be real United States Marines to man them, perhaps with sea experience on a frigate; not the depraved mercenaries of George Lefferts.

There was not much sense in dreaming about a mythical shipyard on the bay. That was as hopeless almost as dreaming about those stores expected for so long; or the whereabouts of the tools of those drunken riggers; or how the fleet could be finished before the lake went down so far that the ships couldn't be gotten over the bar. Chid couldn't help feeling, remembering all the disappointments and the growing depression of Mr. Brown and Perry, that they all had been monstrously betrayed.

Nez Nott lay in a wet gully beside a deer run which he had discovered southeast of the Erie one day while driving pigs from Link Caswell's farm to the navy yard. He had meant to try for that deer for a long time. It bedded each day in a thick hemlock swamp, using this run from an orchard near the lake shore where it fed at night.

"I'm personally," Nez muttered to himself, "damn' sick o' hog and cow. Chid gets the notionest ideas, times. 'Venison,' he sez. 'Venison, for my *Ariel* boys.' Gramp Nott, your fav'rite's sure goin' to be one o' the *Ariel* boys when this buck's roasted."

He laid his musket carefully on the pine-needle-covered sod, covering the run. It was almost dark. A thin yellow streak of daylight remained in the western sky, and the stars were beginning to sparkle overhead.

Nez was happy. The assignment of foraging had removed the one great distaste from his resolve to work hard. He had visualized work at Presque Isle only as shipbuilding. He did not dislike shipbuilding; it was only that he doubted his ability to remain for any length of time at one job.

There had been no monotony about his assignment. He now knew the land about Erie as well as most of the natives. He seldom traveled the

same road twice and never knew exactly where hunger or night would overtake him. It did not matter to him; all his life had been so, and Nez would not have traded his lot with any man on the face of the earth. That his talents could be of use to the nation and to Noah Brown, who personified the entire war effort for him, gave him deep satisfaction. His wanderings were unquestioned by any man. His task was but to find and procure—somehow—whatever was needed at Presque Isle. So far he had not failed once, though he was cautious about revealing the details of his successes.

It was almost full night when Nez heard a faint stirring in the forest gloom beyond the deer run. It was not the deer. Deer made noise only in the autumn woods, never in wet spring. Instinctively he curled his finger about the musket trigger and waited.

He could see what had made the noise now. Across the run, not ten rods away from him, an Indian had crept from the forest and thrown his musket to cover the deer's path. He could smell the thick rancid grease which protected the savage from insects. Nez guessed the Indian was one of the Corn-Eater's tribe and hostile. He'd brushed with them before and the Corn-Eater had cause to remember him.

Nez remained quiet, with a patience born of many a stalk like this. His situation posed a new problem, however. To shoot the deer would draw the Indian's fire to himself; to shoot the Indian would certainly scare the deer. And deer meat was the object, not Indian, Nez reflected.

The deer suddenly stood upwind, sniffing the night air, wraithlike and silent. Nez sensed rather than saw the beast. He steadied his musket, squinting carefully over the battered sights whose error he alone understood.

The deer paced daintily along the path, pausing from time to time, not entirely unsuspecting. There was a night shine to the eyes, sometimes seen even in humans, and Nez always waited for this green gleam before firing. His problem, he reckoned, would be solved in two more of the deer's high prancing steps.

He heard with satisfaction then, the sudden loud crack of the Indian's gun. The deer fell as if stoned, with a tired sigh. Nez pulled his trigger then, aiming between the two green eyes. He heard another sigh, then the clatter of the Indian's gun as he fell upon it.

Nez kicked the body with an exploring toe. The Corn-Eater's brother was stone dead. "I never see one yet wasn't a pure damn' fool," Nez mumbled, setting his belt knife into the deer. "Well, I better not mention this to Chid an' the *Ariel* lads. No sense spilin' their venison."

Nez reached Erie with both hind haunches about midnight.

"Now, a really smart man," Nez mused over his nightcap at Stone's, "would've figured it out so that damn' Indian would've done the totin' too. Nez Nott, yer slippin', I d'clare!"

Chapter Eleven

CHID SUPPOSED THAT he had been dozing. He was utterly weary these days. His foremanship had not excused him from manual labor, and the quiet guard duty permitted him many a welcome little nap.

Half-asleep, he heard the far-off reports of two musket shots, and when he opened his eyes fully he was aware that two men sat on the opposite side of the sentry fire regarding him intently. Chid had seen one of them in the yard many times. The other was a stranger and obviously a city man.

"Don't stir for us, please, mister. I reckon you got a right to snooze the way they're treating you fellows."

"You better say who you are," Chid said sleepily. "I'm supposed to be on sentry duty."

Both men laughed in a friendly manner. The city man offered Chid a gold-trimmed snuff box. Chid declined it, waiting.

"My name's John Shallus, of Baltimore; your servant, sir. At Erie on business. This is Christopher Kemp, my associate. You may have seen him about. I'm talking to Chidsy Alwyn, am I not?"

"A-yep."

Mr. Shallus stood up and shook hands. He was a dandy, turned out in neatly fitting clothes. He held his hard gray hat gracefully against his flowered waistcoat with his left hand and twirled a heavy silver watch chain with his right, letting it wind on his finger to the curious charm at the end, then twirling it the other way, unwinding it. He was smooth-shaven, save for deep sideburns of blue-black, and Chid noted the firm set of his jaw.

"Shake hands with Mr. Alwyn, Chris," John Shallus said. "You two will get to know each other right well in time, I hope."

Chid shook, careful not to let go of his musket. He wasn't sure about the two men yet. They seemed friendly, almost too friendly.

"Chris," said Shallus, "is a woodsman; a timber expert, you might say, Mr. Alwyn. He works for me. Chris has been watching you."

"I recollect. He's been hanging around the *Ariel*."

"That's right, he has. He's mighty pleased with that boat, the timber in her, that is. Chris tells me you got a knack of picking out good ship stock."

Chid felt complimented. "All ship timber has to be good," he said, "even on hasty ships like these. I try to put in the best, at least the best my Canuck can find hereabouts. Mr. Hog made the mistake of getting his lumber from some mill at Waterford, a houseboard mill . . ."

"It was my mill," Mr. Shallus grinned.

"I didn't mean offense," Chid said.

"Nor did I take any, Mr. Alwyn. Indeed, when Orlando Hog cut me out, I looked into the trouble and realized for the first time that this section was rich in virgin ship timber. Mr. Hog did me a favor, you might say. Timber is my business, Mr. Alwyn; not ship's timber, but houseboards and match-sheathing and shingles and whatever they want down at the cities within reason. I've got four sawmills in this state."

"Ship timber ought to be your business," Chid said. "We spend half our time up here sawing instead of building. I reckon I could mention you to Mr. Brown, and he'd have some business for your mills if you'll cut the way we need it."

"It's good of you, indeed. The trouble is, though, that I can ship heavy timber only one way—by boat down the streams and rivers, to the south. I can get all the business I want that way. But a man can always do with more, can't he?"

"I guess if he had the market, he could," Chid said. He sat down again, his curiosity thoroughly aroused. He thought that he could smell opportunity. Mr. Shallus was working up to something. Chid had no idea what. Shallus stretched himself beside Chid, leaning on one elbow, still twirling his watch chain. Mr. Kemp leaned against a tree and commenced whittling.

"After Mr. Hog opened my eyes, I went south and found a market," Mr. Shallus said and took snuff with dainty relish, "a tremendous market

—the whole Navy on the coast if I can get material to them. They're building like fiends right now; so are the privateer companies and the steamboat companies on the Ohio. I can sell anything I can deliver, spar pine, knee oak, rock elm, chestnut, white oak. They'd give their souls for decent white oak."

"The good coastal timber was cut down years ago, Mr. Shallus. But there's still plenty of it up here, I'd guess the best oak I've ever laid eyes on. All you got to do is deliver, and it seems that you got that licked."

"Yes; pretty good. My big trouble is shipping the right timber. Chris tried two arks full a while ago, but it was the wrong stuff. No blame to Chris, y' understand; he doesn't know ship wood like he knows board and shingle stock. The Navy turned down more than half of it, and I lost on the deal. I'm trying to find a man who could pick sure-fire stuff, right from standing trees, and say how to cut it right. It seems to me a ship-builder could do it best, don't you?"

"A-yep, he could, sir."

"What's a breast hook, anyway?" Kemp asked. "They keep wanting breast hooks." Chid laughed, feeling a curious excitement.

"It's a natural-grown knee, used for bracing in tight bends, like at the stem and the quarters. It's mostly a matter of cutting the right log the right way. Breast-hook stock has to be field-grown, out alone, not in the big stands."

"Chris, pay attention," Shallus grinned genially. "We've got something to learn from Mr. Alwyn. Suppose," he said to Chid, "we did the selecting instead of the shipyards? Right up here. Send down only marketable material?"

"It would be the smart way to do it, Mr. Shallus."

"How would you like to do it for me, Mr. Alwyn?"

"Fine," Chid said. "I guess you'd pay me more than ten dollars a month."

"Lord!" Kemp snorted. "Is that all you get?"

"Yes. I'm only an apprentice. I will be, for three months yet."

"I'll make it a point to see Mr. Brown," Mr. Shallus said. "I could buy you out."

"I doubt it," Chid said. "I tried it before. Besides, I don't think I want to get out of it; not until the fleet's been built. I passed my word I'd stay."

"Money is magic, you know. Who'd you give your word to?"

"I guess I gave it to myself, Mr. Shallus. It took me a long time to see the right of—well, doing my duty, you might say. A gunboat depends on me, and a crew of men; maybe this whole lake frontier. I wouldn't want to quit right now with things so confused and licked up here. I could work for you after July, I reckon."

"That's when we send the last arks down. The rivers get too low in summer to navigate, even to raft. This war might be over by then and the chance to make money be gone, Mr. Alwyn."

"I reckon."

"You could teach Chris how to pick the right stuff. I'd pay you good for that."

"Nope. I wouldn't want to do that."

"I'd pay five hundred dollars, Mr. Alwyn."

"It's handsome," Chid nodded, "but it would be like selling the key to a treasure vault. Anyway, I reckon it ain't a question of money, Mr. Shallus. Someday I want those trees myself."

"Lord Harry! Mr. Alwyn," John Shallus laughed, "there's timber enough a whistle north and a holler south to build all the ships Lake Erie will ever require. This land all belongs to the Pennsylvania Population Company, but it doesn't know what it owns or doesn't own. The timber is anybody's, and the company is glad to have us open logging roads from the river-head settlements into their sections. I don't suppose this country will ever run out of timber."

"I don't know," Chid said. "You ought to see what the farmers did to the timber stands down along salt; cut them for fences and cordwood and buildings and just plain bonfires. I recollect my father going all the way to the Penobscot, in State of Maine, for plank pine when I was a shaver. I don't reckon there's a decent lower spar in all Connecticut, not that ain't somebody's front-yard pet-tree."

"Well, we needn't worry—there is all the timber here that we'll want in our lives. Mr. Alwyn, if you ever change your mind, or say I can get you bought away from Noah Brown, I think we'd do well together."

"A-yep," Chid said and took the hand that was offered, "I think so too. I wish you could wait until August."

Chris Kemp snapped his knife closed and shook hands also. "Come

down to the Le Boeuf an' look us over, Mr. Alwyn," he said cordially. "I cal'ate our mill's interestin' and educational to a man what knows mechanics like you."

"I will," Chid promised, "first chance I get. The job right now is to win this war."

"Aye; win the war and make a profit, eh, John?"

"They go hand in hand," Mr. Shallus said with a twinkle in his eyes. "Somebody always gets rich on war; why not us? You think that angle over, Mr. Alwyn. Good night."

Chid's tour of guard duty was ended, and he could hear his relief trampling down the corduroy road, whistling loudly. He said good night. Mr. Shallus and Chris went south, to Waterford near which Shallus had a big mill that shipped to Pittsburgh by way of French Creek.

He turned over his musket to his relief, the man having forgotten to draw one from the guardhouse on the edge of the town.

"Captain Dobbins come in from Black Rock 'bout ten," the man said. "His packet was jest two cables ahead o' the British patrol schooner. Dobbins said if he'd had one o' them turnin' guns like you're makin' he'd a sunk him. As t'was, he couldn't cast round to make his gun bear."

"Did he bring the supplies?"

"Nope. Not a damn' item. That stuff went to Sackett's Harbor like usual. It never even saw Black Rock. What you fellers goin' to do now?"

"I don't know," Chid said. "Without those supplies, the *Ariel's* at a standstill."

Honest Huntley had the king plank all fitted and set when Chid made a quick inspection with a cedar flare. Nez was lounging before a chip fire in the lee of the hull, his eyes riveted on the black bay of Presque Isle.

"Chid," Nez said, "I made a turrible mistake a-growin' o' this danged garland on my chin. It itches an' smells like feathers in hell these warmin' days. You want to hack her off fer me?"

"Nope; not tonight, Nez. I got a letter, I see."

"From Moses?"

"Nope. Better'n Moses, Nez."

"Hunh! From Mary, then."

"A-yep. Let me be now, Nez."

The Indian dispatch-runner had placed the letter on the shack laying-out table where orders and dispatches were always left. Chid broke the seal in wonderment. The mail agent's quill, careless and scratching, had written in the upper right hand corner of the folded paper packet "Sackett's Harbor to Erie, 12 cents: Paid." Was it possible that Mary Leet was at Sackett's Harbor on Lake Ontario? Hastily Chid read the letter.

Mary's news was amazing and, in a way, disturbing. She was at the Ontario naval base. Moses had taken lake fever, one of the first of the sixty who were now stricken. Mary, answering the alarming communication from Mr. Eckford which had pointedly suggested that some of Moses' family be near by, had made a dash by the mail stage to Albany and then north with a government supply train. Moses was out of danger now, as the result of a drastic cure which had seen the old man plunged into a barrel of hot water several times daily to induce sweating. He was still terribly weak and able to do but the lightest of work.

...his eyes burn with the fire of a boy's [Mary had written in her neat precise hand], and he simply will not hear of returning home with me. He has told me how much the fleets, both ours and the one on Erie, need you shipbuilders. It makes me terribly proud of him—and of you, too, Chid.

There is much to be done here, and father's great experience is worth a score of the worthless loafers who work for outrageously high wages as shipbuilders here. Commodore Chauncey plans to make an attack on the British fleet and to take the forts on the Niagara River and depends utterly upon the few like father to see that his ships are in fighting trim. I strongly suspect that father wants to join in the shooting, for I have seen him many times, ramrod in hand, show the poor farm boys who man the lesser vessels how to sponge, load, and fire their carriage guns. I have forbidden him to take over a group of these boys for gunnery training. Indeed, I have had to call on Mr. Eckford (who, Chid, is a very wonderful and decent Christian gentleman indeed) and ask him to restrain father under penalty of my returning him home at once.

Mr. Eckford agreed, very civilly, nor was I put to the use of a feminine demonstration which I had rehearsed at some length, to assign father to overseeing the cutting of the ship's timber as it is needed. He will thus be in the good outdoors, and I have made him promise to sit by

only, contributing nothing but his direction and his experience, until he is somewhat stronger. He growls like a fouled smack master, sitting each day on a stump in the sun, his tally book open and his musket handy, for there is always the possibility of one of these British-Indian raiding parties stumbling upon us—but he knows he is doing a very valuable service to the cause. As always, however, father is inclined to measure effort by manual accomplishments . . .

There was more, for Chid's eyes alone, little words and phrases, mixed in with the newsy gossip, as if the memory of that sweet, bashful kiss so long ago had crept into the tight handwriting.

... It was so good to learn that you really were with Mr. Brown's party, Chid. We were all afraid that you had sailed off on the *Blessed Cause* with that hateful Captain Fish and his rabble. Why did you let us think that? And why did you go off without saying good-by to us, Chid—and to me? But it does not matter now. You are in the one place that your talents can be useful in this dreadful war, and we are glad. We have heard that Captain Fish got into some sort of trouble at sea and came into New York terribly cut up and sinking. He is dead; so is Mr. Tinker, his mate, and only Mr. Bolt is alive to tell the true story, whatever it is and providing he lives beyond the frightful wounds he suffered.

Give my regards to your friend Nezhiah Nott. He is a wild boy, Chid, but father insists that he has his peculiar uses at Presque Isle. I was sorry not to have seen him when he last was here. Commodore Chauncey was furious with him, especially at his effrontery in "demanding" certain supplies which he had been sent for. It is rumored that Nezhiah got the supplies, stole them, in fact. Livy Bracket, who was supposed to be on civil guard at the time of the theft (though father will not hear any man name it that) was found to have been conveniently asleep at his post and has been fined a full week's wages for his lapse.

Good night, Chid, I pray that I might soon again say that to you under peaceful heavens back in our own land. May God take care of you, and may He spare you the strength and will from your tremendous tasks to write, however brief, to

Your friend,
MARY LEET

Chid's reply to the letter was cautious. During these last weeks, in this strange cold region, sometimes hurtlingly lonesome for the simple, homely little things of his life in Portersville, Chid realized that he was deeply in love with Mary. Ever since that curious, moving experience the night he stayed with Beaumelle Trask, he knew. Mary, after that night, suddenly emerged for Chid as a woman. She, too, could be soft and desirable, could be yielding. She was no longer merely one of the cold components of his dream, a mere lifeless part of his plan. She was now, though separated from him by hundreds of miles of unfriendly wilderness, oddly closer to him than she ever had been at Portersville, closer even than on that summer night when they had shyly, experimentally, kissed. He wanted desperately to tell her that he loved her, to feel again the thrill of her nearness.

He was careful not to declare his love in stark strokes of the quill. But he reckoned, closing the letter long after the midnight change of the guard, that Mary could read between the words. He meant for her to. Girls had that knack, like that thin, pathetic girl of Hank Purdy's who could even read between his silences.

Chid lay down on his rough canvas bunk at last with a curious anticipation that his dreams would be of Mary. But he slept in heavy blackness, and his first thought in the gray dawn was not of Mary, but of that long talk with John Shallus and Chris Kemp.

A man who could offer five hundred dollars just to learn how to log off a tree for ship's timber must be making fabulous profits.

"Mr. Alwyn," Orlando Hog said, through the shack door, "the boys is all set to lick in them rigger's fitin's. Only trouble is, Dan Dobbins didn't get the fitin's from Black Rock. Now, what do you recommend, Mr. Alwyn?"

"Mr. Hog, you keep the boys at something useful for the day. Nez and I have been scheming up a little plan."

"Well, I sure hope you schum good. By Goddy, this is the damndest way to build a ship. I don't reckon I could frame up even a satisfactory barn 'thout I had the material."

"You'll have material," Chid promised. "Just keep busy and don't lose faith."

"Faith! Hah! In who?"

"Mr. Brown—and Captain Perry."

"Hunh! Them, aye—but I'll stick my faith onto you, I reckon, Mr. Alwyn."

Daniel Dobbins knew about the plan which Chid and Nez had concocted. He could admire the audacity of it, even allow a fair chance of success, but he hated to take the responsibility of giving his official approval. Yet he understood, better than any man at the bleak, starved naval base, the need of supplies and material to keep the five little ships from which the nation expected so much growing and becoming useful.

Dobbins was in a curious situation. He was at present in charge of the base, Captain Perry and Mr. Brown both having gone south to far-off Pittsburgh and Philadelphia to beg the help so desperately required. He knew the problems of the lake frontier. He had grown up with them, for he had been an Erie man since 1796.

He knew the lake well and had made his living in the salt-carrying trade from Canada to the American shore. His little sloop, the *Salina*, was one of the eight commercial vessels on the lake, and Dobbins always maintained that he was the first pilot registered on Lake Erie. It was he who carried the news of the capture of Detroit to President Madison at Washington, and he never forgot that memorable visit with James Madison.

The President was furious, not only with General Hull, who had so shamefully surrendered the Detroit fort without making a fight, but with the Navy Department which had so stupidly neglected the defenses of the lakes.

"It is obvious," the President told Dobbins, striding the carpeted length of his shoddy office, "that we must gain control of the lakes."

"You've set the course, Mr. President," Dobbins retorted. "Now, you get them sleepy commodores o' yours to get a fleet started."

"The commodores have had their chance, Mr. Dobbins," Madison replied wearily. "I am—privately—thoroughly disgusted with them. Mr. Dobbins, I'd like to have an Erie man, yourself, sir, take charge of our problems on the lake. I can offer you a master shipwright's commission and three thousand dollars in gold for expenses and my own authority behind anything that you do. Will you take the job?"

The commission suited Dobbins. He was a man of action, sometimes very sudden action. He was plodding over the frozen trails to Presque Isle that very night, and within a month had gathered a crew of choppers and barn carpenters and commenced the building of the fleet. Indians ran his men off once. The winter was bitter. Neither the promised supplies nor the pay for his men arrived, but Dobbins was never daunted. On Christmas Day, 1812, he left for Washington, and before New Year's Day he had the promise of real help; Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry and Noah Brown would take charge of the Presque Isle base which he had started.

He still had the naval rank of master shipwright, and Captain Perry and Lieutenant Jesse Elliot were both his superiors. But at heart he was a civilian, used to fighting with the only weapons he knew; his knowledge of the lake trade and that cunning with which he had often in the past outwitted the arrogant British patrols and the Indians. So now, with Chidsy Alwyn, the youngster in charge of the *Ariel* gunboat, and that intrepid individual of his own ilk, Nez Nott, standing before him, he was inclined to listen to their proposal with attention.

"I can't," Dobbins said, "give you permission to undertake a naval operation, y'understand, boys. On the other hand, I can't stop you from—well, taking a little sail on the lake, can I?"

"You're all right, Dan," Nez said with a grin. "But I reckon you don't get the idee complete. We need the only sloop at Presque Isle. She happens to be yours."

"The *Salina*?"

"A-yep."

Dobbins considered the question carefully. The *Salina* was all he had in the world. Even his government pay was but a signed requisition, not spendable until it had been pawed by a hundred hostile, quibbling Washington Navy Department clerks. But he did not hesitate.

"Here's the key to her cuddy, boys," he said, trying to make it sound inconsequential. "You'll find her an able little vessel."

"By God, you're a sport, Dan," Nez said, with sincere admiration. "You're like never to see her again."

"I know," Dobbins said and grinned wryly. "Good luck to you, boys. I wish I was with you."

They met Antoine at the stone wharf on the bay shore under the town. It was almost noon before they had the *Salina* under plain sail and scudding before the brisk, warm, southerly wind. Chid guided her over the bar, amazed again at the sudden abrupt shoaling of the deep water. But the *Salina*, which was a drop-keeler, like those the Dutchmen used for ditch-crawling, did not touch the bar and, veering north, reached swiftly toward the cruising grounds of the British patrol gunboat.

"Is bad thing," Antoine observed ruefully. "Kill de nice littly boat lak dis. Gardamn, Cheed, but ant no odder way to do him, Ah d'clare."

"Nope, no other way, Antoine," Chid agreed. "But I reckon it's better to run the chance of losing one sloop than see the *Ariel* killed before she ever gets launched."

"Oh, yas, suh! Ah t'ink dat ver' much, me."

Nez was busy in the shallow hold. He rolled six gunpowder casks under the main hatch, then methodically broached each head. He laid a short fast fuse from the center one, then led it upward through the hatch and tied it carelessly to a ring bolt. On the hatch cover he placed a gun-match and then went aft and lighted a battle lantern. This he kept screened under a staved fish tub.

"Let 'em come," he announced, joining Chid at the long locust tiller aft. "Chid, you raised that patrol yet?"

"There's been a sail to windward for the last ten minutes, Nez. She just changed tack for a beat down to us. I reckon it's the Britisher."

"Well, I hope she's a big un, a schooner rate at least."

Chid held his course until he was sure that the *Salina* had been sighted and was under chase. When she was at last hull up on the heaving green lake, the Britisher proved to be one of the Malden four-gun schooners. She was one of eight, built to support the heavy rates which were building on the Canadian shore.

"Ah t'ink," Antoine cried, "dat Orlando Hog he lak ver' much de i'on from dat dar boat, Cheed. Why she so low in de water, hein?"

"Loaded, Antoine. Stores or ballast—and I'm praying it's stores. Get a tops'l set, boys, and give her another jib. We've got to make out a good chase, or they'll try to take us in small boats."

The light sails fluttered in the brisk breeze and crept up the stays, hanks clanking musically, then suddenly stiffened to full-bellied working

canvas as Nez and Antoine braced home the sheets. The *Salina* growled under her forefoot and shucked spray in leaping rainbow showers along the immersed lee topsides. The Britisher sent up square topsails, then laced a driver to her main and altered course to a long converging reach that would pin the *Salina* between herself and the steep clay banks of the shore. She would, Chid estimated, bring them up under chaser guns before darkness. And that was all right by him.

The sun was lowering before the first shot came whistling across the waters. The British vessel was fair astern now, using her bow chaser regularly. She gained fast, for she was a powerful sailer, of at least a hundred tons.

"Cut your tops'l halyard, Nez," Chid cried, "and don't be seen."

The sail suddenly cracked like a musket aloft, then, unsheeted, billowed forward, whipping and flailing to leeward. Chid reckoned with satisfaction that it looked accidental. He could not bring himself to surrender yet, even though it meant risking heavy close gunfire. The British well knew the courage of the Americans. This capture, up to the very last minute, must appear to be genuine.

He held his course. Without the powerful topsail the sea-room between the two plunging ships lessened by fathoms each minute. That last bow shot was close, too close to make an exposed position at the tiller comfortable.

Chid crouched behind the solid bulk of the taffrail. Musket fire from the marine detail which all these Britishers carried was not impossible. He felt an odd detachment, as if he directed this dangerous maneuver from a safe far-off position, as if this was all play-acting and at any moment the participants would cease playing and retire from the stage. But his mood was quickly shattered. A solid bar shot crashed into the counter, its impact whacking the rudder sharply over, the sudden electric life of the tiller stinging Chid's gripping hand as if lashed by a leather whip. Nez was lighting the powder match from the covered battle lantern. From the pursuing schooner there came a hail garbled by distance, but Chid recognized it as a demand to surrender or suffer the full fire of the man-o'-war.

The time had come, and upon him alone depended the next maneuver in this wild plan.

He threw the tiller hard up, bracing his back against the terrific reflected pressure of the full sails. Slowly the *Salina* luffed into the wind, stood straight and lay, a dead killed ship across the course of the Britisher. In a moment the enemy matched the move; her sails, too, fluttered idly, and before her way ceased she lay neatly along the starboard side of the *Salina*.

Grappling hooks crashed into the ratlined shrouds, a dozen muskets covered the three Americans, pipes shrilled for the sail trimmers. An officer, a young man hardly older than Chid, in full uniform, regarded the prize coldly from the port-quarter rail.

"What ship is that?" His clerk called.

"*Salina*, out of Erie, Pennsylvania," Chid said carefully.

Nez, he noted, was where he should be, his match lighted. Antoine hung over the knightheads, already gossiping in French with a Canuck seaman on the Britisher's foredeck. Chid wondered if he had trailed the gig overside as they had agreed. It would be their only possible chance of life if the Britisher proved stubborn—or stupid.

"What cargo, please?" came from the clerk.

"In ballast," Chid said, "and a mite of powder."

"Where bound?"

The unwinking musket bores, aimed at his heart, gave him a queer creepy feeling. He had a momentary fleeting fear that this cold young Englishman, so aloof that he could converse with his enemies only through a fleet clerk, might forget the military aspects of the situation, might reduce the cool enmity in his eyes to personalities. He depended upon this captain to remain impersonal, to accept what was coming without individual passion. After all, he would receive a choice which the trained military mind could solve in but one honorable way.

"Where bound, I say, captain?" the clerk repeated.

"Right to this spot," Chid said. "We came out to capture you."

The English commander smiled thinly in lofty amusement. A gunner, blowing his smoking match into fire, guffawed loudly. Behind their muskets the marine file tensed.

"A pity to disappoint you, captain," the clerk observed dryly. "Were you going to perhaps, ah,—use fisticuffs?"

"Nope," Chid said and watched Nez. "Blow you up. I'm still going

to if you don't abandon ship within five minutes. You'd better take a look at Nez—he's that skinny man standing over the main hatch with the lighted match. Right under him is a hold full of powder. I reckon were you to do anything we don't like, he'd set off that fuse. 'Course, you could shoot us—but Nez would drop his match right into the powder then. We're grappled mighty close onto you, captain; we'd both go. It takes some consideration, I reckon."

The darkening twilight crept over the two vessels, like a descending shroud. The wind drifted them to the northward. A long-tailed slick of calmed water reached from the two ships like a tail. Shore birds dipped and cried over it, annoying the surfacing smelt schools. It was as if all the world had paused, waiting for the answer of the British commander.

Chid could feel sorry for him. Likely he was a decent fellow, perhaps on his first command. Now he must lose his ship, surrender her without a fight because of another of those simple Yankee tricks which always so upset the military calculations of the trained fighter.

Finally the clerk turned from his captain and again addressed Chid. "I am ordered to count three," he said. "The marines will shoot you where you stand upon the third count unless that man over the main hatch throws his match overside before."

"I'd advise you come and have a look," Chid said steadily. "One man may come."

"One."

Nez brought the fuse end to within six inches of the match. The action was not missed on the British quarterdeck. The commander himself stepped hastily to the break of the poop.

"Mr. Lefferts," he called clearly, "board that Yankee, please, and let me know if there is powder beneath the hatch. Alone, please."

"By Goddy," Nez muttered, "Chid, it's that bastard George Lefferts. How do you suppose..."

"Quiet, Nez. Let him have a look."

Chid felt again that strange sense of play-acting. George Lefferts, in full British marine captain dress, immaculate as always, stepped daintily from the gunboat to the deck of the *Salina*. It was as if the play were an old one, acted before, and Lefferts was again stepping forth upon the *Blessed Cause* to make his nightly round of inspection.

They eyed each other for a long pregnant minute. Chid felt his hatred for the fat captain rise again, could feel that hatred returned doubly. Lefferts, during that last fight, had escaped and taken with him most of the prize money, that money which was to have meant so much to him and to Mary Leet.

"Ah, the carpenter boy's fortunes have risen," Lefferts said with a calm sneer. "Well, well—you learned from excellent teachers"

"You better look at that powder," Chid said quietly.

Lefferts strode forward. He peered briefly into the hold. Without a word he reboarded the gunboat. "Six casks, black serpentine powder," he said to the captain. "I know these men, sir; they're not bluffing."

Antoine was conversing excitedly. His Canuck acquaintance on the Britisher was from near his own village, east of Quebec. The woman whom Antoine feared had married. She no longer searched for him with the heart of the wildcat. One child had been born, shortly after the marriage. The woman was now a good wife, an excellent mother.

"Le bon Dieu smiles," Antoine babbled happily. "It is dam sham dat you aire to be blow hup, ma fran'."

Nez's match sputtered in the gathering gloom. A bosun's pipe on the gunboat cut the night sharply. The Britisher's quarter-boat was being lowered; the chocked midship yawls were being slung overside.

Chid breathed in relief. His English adversary was a competent officer and understood the needlessness of sacrificing lives to save a doomed ship.

"You can take anything that you can carry except muskets," Chid said boldly. "Leave your sails standing. Row toward the middle of the lake until I sail clear. Then you can make for Canada. It's a good day's going—unless you'd rather land on the Pennsylvania shore."

They paid no attention to Chid. This was not a naval capture; he did not merit the notice of even the defeated. But it was all right with Chid. The *Ariel* would go on. This gunboat would supply her with fittings and iron enough for her completion.

Nez tossed his match overside at last. The British were off on the lake, in three boats, already making for Canada under sail. Antoine cut away the grappling-hook lines. The two vessels parted, veered round on the wind, and raced through the night toward Erie.

Chid was alone on the prize, serving the helm, keeping off the dark port shore by sight and the echo of the growling bow wave. She was a monstrous vessel for a single man to handle. But there would be no sails to trim, nothing to do but steer her for Erie shore and the waiting ship-builders.

He felt a tremendous pride in the achievement, almost a personal ownership of the captured gunboat. It was a pity to burn such a vessel, for she was honestly built, fitted with genuine tested deep-water fittings, not the makeshift ironwork of the Presque Isle fleet. But, hoarded and carefully used in only the most necessary places, her stores and fittings would outfit three or more of the American vessels.

Just before dawn Chid grounded the gunboat on the rubble beach at the mainland end of the bay reef, near the naval storehouse. Then he went to the office for some sleep. Before he awakened, Real Taylor and the civil guard had removed all the naval stores. There were coils and coils of fine-quality hemp line, casks of Stockholm tar, spare sails, and bolts of fine canvas. The bosun's storeroom yielded tools of fine Swedish iron, and bags of rigging and ship fittings, spare blocks, dead-eyes, lizards, sheaves and pinions, gun tools, dry bolts for the gun carriages, cutlasses and muskets, all of a quality far beyond anything that could be expected from American forges.

The steward's cubby produced some fancy London food, evidently for the officer's mess, and the orlop barrels of ship's biscuit and salt beef, all branded with the crown of His Majesty's Britannic Government. The powder was French, fine-grained and fast burning, and the lower hold contained shot in efficient British abundance.

The spars were cut away and floated ashore with lines and blocks still attached, to be stripped later. By sunset the gunboat was a naked hulk, and when Chid came to her from his sleep, the first flames were licking at her. By another sunset she would be ashes and cooling spikes and bolt iron and straps and hangers.

Daniel Dobbins was proud of the capture and delighted that the *Salina* had been returned whole to him.

"I always figured she'd do well as a two-gun boat," Dobbins said to Chid and Nez. "When Captain Perry returns I'm going to offer her to him. We can mount the British guns on her and use the British shot,

which won't fit our bores nohow. I kind of cal'ate she was spared for that."

"She's sure a charmed critter," Nez said. "I don't know what them English'ud done to her if they discovered we was on'y bluffin'."

"There was no bluff," Chid said. "The only chance we had was to jump overside and try to make the gig Antoine had trailing."

"Oh, you an' Antwine wasn't bluffin'," Nez said. "But, hell to Betsy, Chid, I was. Them casks was no more powder'n mud is. Fact, that's what 'twas, good pulverized Lake Erie black mud. I filled 'em myself."

"You had a requisition for powder, Nez."

"Aye, I did; signed right by Dan here. But Elliot, he wouldn't let go o' none o' his powder from the arsenal. Anyways, he had on'y two casks hisself. So I done the best I could. Chid, a man can't get all set for some prime fun like that there and give up just 'cause o' missin' a mite o' powder, can he?"

It was funny now, and Chid found himself laughing. It was Dan Dobbins, however, so much like Nez in many ways himself, who really appreciated the story. He guffawed in the firelight until he was hoarse, then circulated among the shipbuilders, retelling the incident.

After the gunboat had been reduced to a charred backbone, awash and smoking in the bay, they all marched to Stone's tavern.

"The score's on me, boys," Dan Dobbins said. "By Cripsey, the pure nerve o' that New Englander, a-standin' over six casks o' mud, my own Lake Erie mud! I never, no sir, I never! Nez, tell the boys again. By Goddy, the British have got somethin' to be sore about now. Tell 'em again, Nez!"

Chapter Twelve

CHID WAS UP before dawn on the second day of May. It was stickily warm, even before the sun rose above the great stand of virgin white oak which bordered the hemlock swamp east of the village. Nez and Antoine were both in from the woods. They slept now on the shack floor, rolled into thin blankets, looking like soiled, discarded bundles.

Chid pulled on his pants, rolling up the bottoms to his knees. He had not worn shoes or a shirt for the last few days. A week ago it had come off hot, changed suddenly from a cold, wet, raw spring to the murkiest, most depressing heat that he had ever experienced. In Erie, gossiping on the board sidewalks of the main street, the farmers from the Donation Lands called it "growing weather."

He walked in the gray light to the deep pool above the falls of Lee's Run. Here he doused his head in the clear brook water and splashed his chest and arms. Ever since the lake fever had come, it was forbidden to wash in or drink from the lake water. Captain Perry, after his return from the south, had given the orders; and Real Taylor, who doubled for surgeon rate, not only ministered to the sick, but enforced the rule as well.

There were over twenty men sick, and the hot, sultry weather which caused it but a week old. The malady was known to the medical science as swamp vomit or bilious fever. It was believed to come from the putrefying vegetation which had been left along the lake shore by the dropping of the water to summer levels. It came each year with the growing weather and persisted into the late fall. There was no known preventive, though whisky was popularly supposed to ward the plague off if taken before the skin and eyeballs actually turned yellow. Once a man was stricken and his body heat raised, there was nothing to be done save blood-letting and the administration of teas to induce perspiration. If

black spots appeared upon the body, especially if accompanied by obstinate costiveness, the only known remedial procedure was to prescribe a dose of cinchona bark. It turned the sufferer into a delirious maniac, oddly every second day only, but either killed or cured.

But cinchona bark was unknown in Erie. A very small quantity of it had been found in the stores of the British gunboat, but Real Taylor could only guess at its use and the correct measurement of the dose. The sufferers were all men of the graver's gang who were to launch the *Ariel* today.

They had worked waist deep in the lake, building the underwater extensions of the launching ways, and had been in the very midst of the decay and slime, breathing its poisonous gases and plagued by swarms of vicious mosquitoes. One by one they had collapsed and been carried to the rude emergency hospital above Mr. Stone's traveler's rooms at the Erie Hotel.

Antoine had volunteered to complete the ways and take charge of the launching.

"Ah do; me," he had insisted. "Ho! Fo' t'ree year Ah log de muskeg country; is nozzing, dis, fo' me, Cheed."

"Let him," Nez had grinned. "Them danged insects'll all get poisoned, they nip o' Antwine, Chid. An' the smell o' the lake no Frenchie'll even suspect."

Chid had let him take over the arrangements. He needed no more stock from the woods for the *Ariel*, and Antoine was his best man on heavy timber work.

When Chid got back to the shack, Antoine was shaving off Nez's reddish beard with a honed hunting knife.

"What a day!" Nez said. "I'll never forget it—losing this danged set o' whiskers'll change my whole life, I swear, Chid. When does the *Ariel* take her ride?"

"Whenever Captain Perry passes the word. She's ready now."

"What then, Chid?"

"Why, the riggers will take her over. Then the Navy men, to fit her out, I guess."

"What Navy men?"

"Well, we've got almost a hundred here now, Nez."

"Yeanh! A lousy hundert, an' we need eight times that, all trained an' made inter fightin' men. I d'clare, Chid, sometimes I think we'll have to fight these damned ships as well as build 'em."

"Not me," Chid said with conviction. "I'm glad to build this fleet, Nez, even kind of proud of it, you might say. It sort of gives me a respect for myself. But I figure I'm doing my share, an' damned if I'm going to double for those easy livers down to the states. I've got some plans, just as soon as I'm free of this."

"Supposin' the fleet ain't finished by the time your 'prentice contrack runs out?"

"I don't know, Nez. I reckon the way I feel now, I'd quit. Hell, if everybody did as much as you and me and the gang up here, the war would be over in two weeks."

"Well, don't count on 'em doin' it. But, Chid, you can't figure that way, kind o' dolin' yer patriotism out to suit yerself. You got to keep pourin', right till the bucket's empty."

Antoine finished the shaving with a flourish.

"One tam Ah'll know hol' trapper in de nort' hwoods," he said gravely, "an' hall dat dar feller's life ant nozzing he wants mo' better dan to mak' de farm fo' living. So bym-bye, one day, he catch hall de pelts an' he carry dem to de factor an' he say, 'Ah don' wants flour, Ah don' wants de traps or needer powder or de shot or nozzing. Ah jus' wants cash money 'cause I t'ink Ah'll buy me de farm.' Dat feller, he done dat. He buy de farm, all tilly nice on de sout' sidehill, an' he tak' de wife an' he'll tink, 'Now, Ah jes' set comfly by de stove an' Ah smoke an' bym-bye de seeds dey grow an' dar ants nozzing to do again in mah lifes, fo' never.' Is dat de truth? Non! Sacre, non! De bear come an' ruts hup de co'n, an' de 'coon heats him hup de hoats, an' de skonk mak' dig hup right ba ev'y littly seed hill an' ant nozzing fo' po' hol' fran' but work, all tam work an' mo' work. Dat feller get mad, lak hell. Oh, terrible! 'Ba Gosh,' he cuss. 'Ah ant trapper no mo'! Why mus' Ah catch de bear an' de 'coon an' de skonk? Gardamn, I ants do him no mo', me, ba Gosh!' An', Cheed, dat feller don' no mo' catch de animals. An' bym-bye dem animals heat hup hall de co'n an' hall de bin an' p'tackers jes' cause dat mans ant be trapper no mo'. Is tam shame, dat! But mah fran' is stubborn Quebecer an' he sit ba dat stove an' smoke like dat stimboat we ride him an'

pooty soon, voila—dem varmin's heat hup hall de whole farm. Ants nozzing left on dat nice sidehill! An' mah hol' fran' ants needer de trapper or de farmer, he ants anyzing, an' he ants got nozzing."

Antoine cleaned his knife and stuck it into his belt sheath.

"You're a riddlin' fool o' a Canuck," Nez snorted. "How does that talk signify?"

"Wall," Antoine said in confusion, "is parable, ba gosh, Ah t'ink. Is lak dat wit' Cheed, Ah guess. He build de boat an' bym-bye he say he ants do no mo'. But de British peckly at de boats wit' dey guns an' den dey come where Cheed sit by dat stove lak' he plan an' all sudden, ba Gosh, Cheed mus' chase dem enemy de hell outen dar odderwise he ants got no boats or no plans or not heven no country left. Is de truth, dat, Ah t'ink."

"Well," Nez said, dry-washing his face, "when you explain it all out it makes a little better sense, Antwine. I guess, Chid, that's about the right o' it. There ain't goin' to be no freedom for nobody, not the real kind, till this war's won. It don't matter when the fleet's finished, or when your papers run out. You want to beware you don't get hung up onto that steelyard nub again, Chid. You was way out on the right end. I reckon you still are inside you."

"I'm doing this job because I'm bound out yet," Chid said savagely, "and to keep clear of that *Blessed Cause* trouble till it blows over. I've still got—well, my own plans, Nez."

"It ain't convincin', Chid." Nez laughed and clapped him on the back with a lusty blow. "You can't make me an' Antwine b'lieve you'd risk yer life like you done catching that Britisher last month fer them reasons. You're a hell o' a good shipbuilder, Chid—Uncle Noah sez yer the drivin'est foreman he ever come acrost—why in tarnation don't you try bein' a hell o' a good Chidsy Alwyn?"

"I am."

"You're not. The difference between the way you talk an' the way you do is scandalous, Chid. But you jest watch out you don't get to *thinkin'* the way you talk. I wouldn't be so proud to be named your friend then, I reckon."

They went up the cliff path, sweating in the hot, airless dawn, answering the music of the cookshed triangle at the Cascade yard.

The two heavy brigs which they passed were advancing slowly. The keels lay like serpents in the oozy shore mud, and on the bending rack the huge built-up frame timbers were taking the forms of sweeps and full-bellied curves and double-S bends.

As always they looked with apprehension out upon the graying lake. No British fleet. Not yet. But some day it would come—and before that day not only the *Ariel* but her four sister ships and the gunboats still blockaded in the Niagara River must be complete, fitted out with guns and shot and sails and men to make these things live, must be drawn up in battle array somewhere on this vast lake to demand of men their all.

Right till the bucket's empty, Chid thought.

The *Ariel* stood on skeleton blocking, gleaming in new still-tacky black pot lead. She was a live thing in the sparkling sunshine, and Chid stood away from her, letting his eyes take in every detail, as an artist might view his completed canvas after the long fight with his tools and his colors and his creative ability. Chid found her good to look at. He wished, strangely, that Moses Leet could see her. More than anybody else, he would have liked Moses to say in his quiet way, "Chidsy, you've built a ship."

Moses could put reverence into the word ship. So could Chid's father. He could, now that he also had built a ship, understand why. It was almost as if he had created a life, had invaded the mysterious realm of God and built into the *Ariel* human life and a mortal soul. The *Ariel* had a soul for Chid; she was alive, a being. And by her deeds from this day of birth on she would assume a soul and life for other men. Chid had never felt so about any other ship. He did not feel so about George Carmody's vessels, or the *Blessed Cause*, or the British gunboat which he had sailed down the lake alone on that starlit night.

Besides the *Ariel*, the two other schooners were ready. Chid could find plenty of evidence of the careless vessels they were. Were they his, he would not have permitted them to go over yet. Their paint, it seemed, covered too many mistakes. The oakum had arrived but five days ago, more than two months late, and in the haste to launch, the house carpenters had, as Nez derided, "just festooned the calking into them." The seams of the *Ariel* were tight and tamped down to solid wood. Chid

knew his schooner would never leak nor work herself into a plank-complaining wreck.

Captain Perry and Noah Brown came from the Buehler house, on French Street, their headquarters, in the government rig about mid-morning. It wasn't much of a launching party. There was no fife-and-drum corps to play and no audience to cheer save the gunboat workers themselves. A group of women from the town, on their way to the berry patches on the peninsula dunes, idled under a twisted shagbark, and two dull-eyed swamp Indians lay back in their dirty blankets in the cool shadow of Chid's shanty.

Paph North had on his Sunday wool and a hard hat in spite of the heat, solemnly aware of the significance of the occasion and for once forgetting to complain. The apprentices still busily swept and picked up. Chid wanted Mr. Brown to remember this hull, to remember that it was complete as far as he could take it, even to cleaning up. The riggers and the sailmakers and the Navy, who would take over after the launching, must feel in accepting her the same fierce pride he felt in presenting her.

"You've managed your iron rudder heel, Chid, I see," Mr. Brown said affably. "I'd better not ask where you got it."

"The Cascade forge made it," Chid grinned. "The iron came from Mrs. Buehler's carriage shed. I reckon it's the last bit of iron left in the region. Nez got it when the moon was kind of dark."

"She hasn't missed it yet, or she'd have raised Ned."

"She oughtn't to. I nailed two dollars to the shed doorpost."

"Good. Put it in your accounts, Chid."

"I did," Chid said. "Look, you care to look her over before I give the word? I want to get in ahead of those other two hulls. My boys have been racing them."

"You'll go over first, I promise," Mr. Brown smiled. "Chid, you're an odd lad. Last winter I was sure I was going to have trouble with you."

"Last winter I'd have given it, I reckon," Chid admitted. "Things have happened since."

Captain Perry was delighted with the *Ariel*. He inspected her with the expert eyes of a naval man and could already see her guns mounted, her men stationed, and the battle flag whipping at the masthead. He

couldn't see yet where these things would come from. Real Taylor's hundred seamen were still the only deep-water sailors in Erie. Down in Pittsburgh, Captain Wooley was supposed to be casting guns and shot. So far nothing had come north from him. But the building of the ships had come first. Perry had fought even harder than Mr. Brown for the building stores.

The revolving gun platform drew Perry's interest above all else. He had been frankly dubious about it. The idea had been tried in the past but had always failed. The pivot had been the weak part. It always broke after a few shots.

"This one is different," Chid said with pride. "You mount your gun, sir; I swear it'll hold. This platform rides on twenty-four round shot; that takes the real shock. The pivot's only hickory to keep the thing together and on center."

You could turn the platform with one capstan bar, inserted in the wooden strap which North had growlingly shaped and fastened. Perry, trying it, said a peculiar thing then.

"Alec Drake should see this, gentlemen. Drake taught me all I know about guns; an old-time Navy gunner, he is. I'd fight the British now with only a hundred like him."

"Drake is dead, sir," Chid said.

"No! You know him, Alwyn?"

"No, sir. I heard it; from a man in a tavern in New York."

Almost Chid had said too much. He seldom thought of that trouble on the coast, but once in a while, like the passing of this chance remark by the captain, it was brought sharply home to him. Nez, when he mentioned it, which was seldom, believed that the trouble would eventually catch up with them.

The discovery of George Lefferts up here on the frontier had been a shock to the three of them. It was as if a ghost of the past had risen and come to dwell with them. But, as they reasoned the situation out one evening sitting in the tall grass behind the cliff edge above the yard, Lefferts was in no better position than they were. His crime had been deliberate. That he feared capture and punishment was proved by the fact that he had crossed the border and entered the British service. Antoine reminded them that Lefferts could do them no harm, nor would

he have reason to. "Is lak de skonk, dat mans," Antoine said. "Nozzing but de smell, an' dat ant hurt no one. But Ah kill him jus' de sam lak' de skonk wan Ah see hims, me."

Chid had almost forgotten about Lefferts until this moment.

"This platform would let even an Army gunner shoot good," Chid said hastily. "We ought to try it out."

"I'm afraid there will be little chance," Perry said soberly. "When this fleet speaks for the first time, it will be against the enemy. It must be perfect without trials. Behind the bar we are safe; once over and into the lake, there will be no protection save our guns and our spirit."

"When will the brigs be ready, sir?" Chid asked.

"In six weeks, I hope—and if I get the guns up soon. They've got to be if we are to get them over the bar before the lake falls for the summer. I am advised that the British ships are ready and waiting only for the completion of that new nineteen-gunner."

Chid wondered often how Perry managed to keep up his faith in the fleet. The man was everywhere, and no one had ever seen him other than cheerful and hopeful. General Harrison's Indian spies kept him informed of the British preparations, and the news, as it was pieced together to make a pattern, seemed always black and disastrous. The enemy now had, including the new *Detroit*, six heavily built ships mounting a total of sixty-three guns. So far, at Presque Isle, there were but five incomplete vessels and no guns. In the Niagara River, held there by the threatening ramparts of Fort Erie, there were four more ships; useless to count upon until they were actually in the lake and joined with the fleet. What impressed Chid most about the captain was the generosity of his thought. None of his great difficulties in procuring supplies and men were due to his own lack of vision or preparation, but he never once damned those who were failing so miserably.

It was open knowledge that Chauncey still kept the very best seamen and gunners for himself and sent on only the boys and landsmen to Lake Erie. A small band of them had come into the base a week ago; ragged, unkempt, and unruly fellows who needed a sobering term in the guardhouse before they could become useful. It was well known that the reserve strength of Sackett's Harbor was ample to man completely the Erie fleet, and that it comprised for the most part deep-water sailors,

seasoned in the frigate service and the merchant ships. Real Taylor had hastily issued a call for a volunteer navy. So far he had enlisted about twenty boys and indented blacks. They drilled with wooden staves shaped like boarding pikes and muskets and were sometimes taken on board one of the building ships to acquaint them with shipboard duties. Mr. Brown had finally to stop that. They did more damage than good, and it took the vital time of the shipbuilders to straighten things out after they had left.

But none of these things seemed to depress Captain Perry. He was like a great bright star shining down on the little wilderness world on the windy lake shore, giving strength and hope to those who labored against such odds. At times Chid felt the influence of his example so strongly as almost to forget himself and his ambitions.

Perry stepped aft now. From a common paper poke he drew a folded ensign and bent it to the mainmast flag halyards. It was an impressive moment. To Chid it seemed as if this little man with the soft brown hair and tight, sensitive mouth was alone defying the might of Britain. That might was not yet real to Chid. More to be reckoned with were the enemies within the American lines—those men in high and low places who were stealing time and material and faith and loyalty.

The captain choked back his own emotion. Since his midshipman days, his life had been devoted to the one motto, "To meet the enemies of my country." He had met them in the past, at Tripoli and on the Charleston station and before Fort George. Now at last, God willing, he would meet them in the vital struggle to determine whether free men or a king ruled the continent of America.

Slowly and solemnly, with short smart heaves, the stoppered flag bundle crept to the crosstrees.

"You may give your graver the word, Chid," Noah Brown said quietly.

"Yes, sir."

Antoine had shucked his buckskin shirt. He wore only pants and a cockaded militia hat. He spit on his hands for a good grip on the maul, swinging at Chid's grave nod.

The Canuck's sure, powerful strokes on the last wedges cracked like defiant musket shots in the still morning. Under Chid the *Ariel* trembled and quivered like a creature being born. The apprentices, riding her in

the time-honored tradition of the shipyards, broke into a lusty cheer, and from the crosstrees the flag broke in a blaze of color and waved lazily in the breeze of the schooner's own making, as she rode, screaming and groaning on the smoking blocking, to the lake at last.

She looked beautiful in the water, the most beautiful vessel Chid reckoned he had ever seen. She leaked no place but at the stopwaters, where she should, and they would soon swell tight. Captain Perry shook Chid's hand warmly. "She should prosper well," he said simply. "She was built by a fine American." Chid considered it the nicest thing that had ever been said to him.

The women berry pickers had gathered at the shore in talkative excitement. Their men would know within the hour of the fact of actual launching. The Erie fleet was no longer a vague something to be laughed at. The two Indians slipped silently into the brush. Their nation, too, would know; perhaps at last make up its mind whether to ally themselves with the white men south of the lakes or follow the great Chief Tecumseh who had taken his people to the British side.

As the *Ariel* had plunged into the great rainbow of the disturbed lake, three musket shots had rung out from the redoubt above the Cascade yard where Captain Forster's recently arrived militia company did sentry duty. From Forster, General Harrison's army, harassed by British and Indian raids but still hopeful of an open lake and a full-fledged campaign on Detroit and the Erie north shore, would know, too, that at last the pathetic naval base at Presque Isle had performed as promised. And there were unseen eyes that would know, belonging to men who would wait for darkness before stealing to a rendezvous in the black forest and send scribbled notes by Indian runners to the British from the Michigan Lands to the St. Lawrence.

The riggers came over the gangplank, leather aprons bulging with hastily improvised tools. Their own had never been found. A whip from the foremast carried, as its creaking first load, a bundle of sails. They had been made in distant Albany by women who had never made sails before, from patterns which Chid had drawn while the spars themselves were still standing trees. He hoped that they would fit. A farmer and his two sons trundled lake-stone ballast on board, dumping it into chutes that led beneath the hold and the orlop.

"She'll sail," Nez said, coming ashore from the final wedging of the masts into the partners, "within a week. Uncle Noah, she's quite a vessel."

"Quite a vessel," Mr. Brown nodded. "Good enough for what she was built—one fight."

"Where are her guns?" Chid asked. "That's the next big chore."

Mr. Brown shook his head. Chid had asked that twenty times; so had Perry and Taylor and General Harrison's staff officers. Mr. Brown did not know. Nobody knew. They had left Pittsburgh, twenty long twelves and a short thirty-two for Chid's revolving platform, two weeks ago on flatboats. Since then not a word had been heard of them. They were, like everything else, "on the way." At least a man could now be sure of that. With the use of the southern supply routes Chauncey no longer got his clutches on the supplies and stores.

"I could check on those guns, Mr. Brown," Chid said, "on the other stuff, too, you want. I've got some...well, connections to the south. I'd have to go down to Waterford."

"It's an idea," Mr. Brown nodded. "You could use the government rig; we can spare it today."

"Can I take Nez Nott? I'm not much with a horse."

"Apprentice's holiday," Mr. Brown chuckled. "Well, you deserve it, Chid. Go ahead."

Chid and Nez set off at noon. It was a fourteen-mile jaunt, over corduroy and baked-mud road and through frequent fords at the gullies which cut the rolling parallel heights of land. Tall virgin timber flanked both sides of the road once the lake was left behind. He could see the occasional ragged stump surrounded by slash, where Antoine had been logging off. He was impressed by the quantity of timber. As John Shallus had said, there was enough to build all the ships Lake Erie would ever need.

"Drink, Chid?" Nez asked, producing a flask.

"A-yep. I ain't had one in ages. Foul cables to you, Nez."

Chid drank deeply, letting the fire of the Monongahela whisky seep into his body. They stopped once to eat sausage and a hunk of Utica cheese, and another time to water the aged bony horse. Robert Brown, the tollgate keeper near the halfway marker, took their coins, and re-

ported no naval stores on the Waterford Turnpike that he knew of. "Nuthin' but salt," he said. "Eternal salt goin' down and whisky comin' up." He took a nip with silent gratitude, holding the fire in his mouth for a long time before swallowing it; then gave the directions to Mr. Shallus's mill.

"Folly the pike to the fust farm; a log house 'tis, with a Pennsylvania brigade camped onto the cow lot an' the sarjints plaguin' o' the Lytle gurls. By there, you swang east onto a tote road, through slash, an' bym-bye out you come on Le Boeuf pond...an' there's yer mill. You loggers, boys?"

"Nope. We're at Erie, with Noah Brown."

"Ain't that a to-do at Erie now?"

"We launched the first boat this morning. There'll be two more this week."

"My Gee! You don't say? Mirandy! We never took no stock in that Navy back-country here. A boat launched; well, I d'clare!"

They pushed on. Chid was eager to see the mill. They came upon it first, as Nez said, "by ear." A soft chuffing noise came whispering through the forest, followed by the prolonged harsh rasp of a power saw. Save for that chuffing noise between cuts, reminding Chid of the breathing of the *Firefly* that winter dawn so long ago, it sounded like any water mill.

"Steam mill," Nez pronounced.

"A-yep. Steam's the coming thing, I reckon, Nez," Chid said. "I get to thinking about it lots of times; steamboats, I mean. I found a danged good shipyard site on Presque Isle bay. I been toying with the notion to build a steamboat there some day."

"You'd be crazy to, Chid," Nez said promptly. "Leastways till we get finished fightin' about whose country 'tis. Anyway, you ain't got ar'y a extry dollar to commence no shipyard."

"Nope, not now, I ain't. But I was put in the way of a prime opportunity. Mr. Shallus, the man who owns this mill, wants me to select ship timber for him, standing timber."

"You wouldn't do that, Chid?"

"Wouldn't I, though. Come August you watch me, Nez."

"Oh, August is all right, I reckon. But you wouldn't quit Uncle Noah now, would you?"

"I guess I couldn't. Building that *Ariel* gave me a whale of a pleasant feeling, Nez. I don't suppose I could ever feel better about building a ship—save if I was building her for myself. I reckon that's what I'm planning for once I'm free."

"Well, you'll be outen yer bound-papers soon," Nez said dubiously, "but Gosh knows how free you'll be, Chid."

The Shallus mill stood in a clearing where the muddy Le Boeuf entered a pond; above the fork where the stream joined with French Creek. Great piles of slash and bark slabs surrounded the two long saw tables. Bare-waisted men jacked the logs onto the feeder stringers and guided them, butt ends first, into the whirling vertical saws. The steam plant chuffed beside the stream, using its water, and a long hide belt snaked up the bank to the saws. In the shade clumps at the edges of the clearing, oxen teams, three to a yoke, rested after the haul from the woods. At the end of a rutted clay road carts waited, the nags swishing their long, braided tails at the swarm of flies. On these carts Chid could see some ship knees and crooks of poor quality. Evidently John Shallus still needed him. A driver stopped plaguing a toad with his rod-long snake whip and told Chid that such fancy stock went by team way to the south Genesee country; then down the Susquehanna to the building yards on the Chesapeake and the seaboard.

"What do you bring back?"

"Nuthin'; not from the east. From the south, Pittsburgh and them towns, we fetch back nigh anythin' you could mention. All the Alle-gany trade goes by flatboat mostly. There ain't no good roads yet."

"Guns. And iron shot?"

"Them items is a plague to the boaters, Mister. They don't take 'em unless they have to, an' they don't have to. I hear they's a hull mess o' guns pitched ashore to Bad Woman Island, forty miles south o' here. The boatmen jest quit; draggin' heavy stuff like that over riffles don't pay nohow."

Mr. Shallus was in Baltimore on business. Chris Kemp was on hand, however, checking record shingles in the shady end of an open-front shelter. A rude wooden sign pronounced it the office. Kemp was glad to see Chid. He proved it by pouring a generous portion of a drink that he named "bat blood" and knocking off work.

"I hope this visit means you've changed yer mind, Mr. Alwyn," Kemp said. "I want to tell you we're having a devil of a time cuttin' out ship stuff."

"No, I wasn't meaning to change my mind."

"It's too bad your boss wouldn't sell you out to John. John tried, he did, hard. It's a shame you got to wait till August. We're nigh finished for the season by then. Sometimes the rivers get too low to ship even before then. Say, your Navy boys figured on the lake dropping, ain't they?"

"A-yep. The fleet'll be launched and over the bar long before August. Low water won't trap Perry."

"Maybe not. But his supply people might, they don't hustle. I hear he needs men terrible."

"He needs eight hundred; he's got about one hundred. It's a good thing the British ain't ready to fight yet. They could blast Presque Isle right out of the lake."

"Well, it ain't none o' my worry. Look around, boys. We're modrens this mornin'; even got us a steam engine. She's a buster, she is; a blun-up one, from a Ohio steamboat. John bought her awash, for a pipe tune, an' we run her low-pressure. Well...no call to leave a bran'-new engine for the British, is they?"

Chid approved of the mill. He considered the shipping of the lumber especially cute. The river here was unfit for rafting, and Kemp shipped in large shallow arks made of houseboards cut on the site. These arks were similar to the flatboats which were the common carriers on the frontier rivers, flat, square-ended boxes, about thirty feet long and twelve feet wide. They were shapeless save for the bow, which was raked like that of a barge. The lumber was piled into the arks to the gunwales, then securely spiked to the boat itself to become the ark's real strength. There was neither keel nor deck. Atop the cargo a lean-to living shelter was built, and this was flanked by fore-and-aft plank trestles from which the polers, with a firm set from the bow position, walked the ark beneath them as they tramped to the stern.

Upon reaching Pittsburgh, a logger told Chid, the arks were broken up and sold as regular lumber for half price because of the spike holes and water damage. In that way not only was there no expense in bringing the arks back, but they paid a profit as well.

"Could a fellow buy a whole ark at Pittsburgh?" Chid asked.

"Why not?" Chris Kemp grinned. "Extra cheap; say fifty apiece."

"Could a boat like that carry naval guns?"

"Them to Bad Woman's Island?"

"A-yep."

"Why, I'd say it could be done with proper loadin'. The trouble would be a crew. Polers get paid by the mile; they ain't extended the towpath this far yet. But they wouldn't touch such slow heavy stuff for usual rates."

"Would you give me an option to buy some arks; say for ten dollars the option, Mr. Kemp?"

"Your word's all John Shallus would want," Chris said.

"All right, I give it," Chid said, calculating with his boot toe in the sawdust carpet. "I can let you know in two days."

"It'll be time. We won't ship before that, Mr. Alwyn."

Chris passed the jug again and wished them luck.

Chid said good-by. He was strangely silent on the ride back to Erie. Nez, who was feeling gay and songful, twitted him. "Chid's on the track o' money again." Nez singsonged tunelessly to the sunset:

"Oh, there was a young blade from the coast
He'd make millions o' dollars, he'd boast
So he goes to a lake
There to cut inter his cake
And—"

"Shut up," Chid snapped. "I want those arks for Noah Brown, not myself. Nez, you're drunk!"

"Drunk's a Hessian on Christmas," Nez guffawed and spanked the reins. "Chid, ol' frien', lemme tell you suthin'—yer jealous, jes' god-damn' jealous."

Nez took another long drink from the generous-sized jug of bat blood which Chris Kemp, with sincere cordiality, had insisted that they accept. Chid did not drink. His mind was sharp and keen. Tonight, with that long thinking time on the ride ahead of him, he wanted to keep it so.

They were halfway to Erie, several miles past the Lytle farm and the

militia encampment, when Chid first heard the thunder. It rumbled in the north, like cannonading a great distance off. The deep forests about were dark with dusk, and night was only an hour off. Chid, who had taken the reins when Nez had fallen into a noisy, lurching sleep beside him, spanked them on the nag, hurrying the plodding horse. He'd been through several of the violent lake storms. They formed over the lake after such hot humid days, riding the unbroken sweep of miles of water, then lashed at the land in maniacal gusts and drenching downpours of rain and hail. He reckoned that he could just make the tollhouse before the storm broke.

The cart path was rotted corduroy, said to have been laid by the French invaders in the 1750's as a portage road between the lake and Le Boeuf, which was the original name of Waterford. The carriage jounced fearfully; Chid had all he could do to hang on. Nez rolled himself aft, into the small box, a safe place for a drunk.

After a while the land became more open. The hardwoods were less abundant, and the rolling terracelike hills, flat and meadowlike, reminded Chid of the natural fields of western York State. This was good land here behind the lake. It would settle in time; Erie would grow into a big town, perhaps a city.

It made him think again about the future of this land. He had thought of it often lately, been alert and observant, to see for himself if his hopes were based upon reasonable premises or only wishful thinking.

But he felt certain now that a shipyard could make out on the lake. Until the war had come last June, there had been a lively, profitable carrying trade for the few vessels there were. Daniel Dobbins and his *Salina* had done well. Dobbins owned a farm east of Erie and a great stand of pine timber in the Donation Lands, both properties for which he paid spot cash, it was rumored. There were two other captains in Erie, and three registered pilots, and the lake Marine District roster at Black Rock showed over a hundred men directly connected with navigation. To the last man, these men sailed on shoddy jerry-built vessels, the best that they could procure. They would appreciate real deep-water designs, built in the honest tradition of generations of New England sailing-ship builders.

The steamboat was still a vague part of Chid's plans. He would com-

208

mence with anything that he could manage to contract for—sail, flatboat, or even the little seiners of the white fish and smelt fleet. When the time for the steamboat arrived, the smart thing would be to be in a position to own and operate it himself. But as a starter he needed to get that shipyard site bought in.

He thought ruefully of his resources. For all this hard grueling work he had earned thirty dollars. John Shallus's offer, upon which he had been depending, seemed definitely unproductive unless he accepted it before August. Perhaps next winter when the cutting commenced again he could accept it. But by that time the war would be over. Perhaps other men would think as he did about shipbuilding on the lake; perhaps the yard site, even the near-by timber, would have been bought in by others.

That was an odd song that Nez had sung. It had made him curiously angry.

So he goes to a lake
There to cut into his cake
And...

And—what? Nez had thought that he had bought those options on the arks for himself. He hadn't, he honestly hadn't. But it was a good idea. A man might make a handsome profit, toting for the government. And do the government a sweet turn, too. All he needed were the arks—and his own time.

It was a witless dream, not unlike his others. They all depended upon money, upon capital; upon the freedom to gather the capital, pursue the dream. But, jouncing along in the wagon, the candle lantern swaying from the front axle, Chid knew how he'd like to end that foolish song of Nez's.

Oh, there was a young man from the coast.
He'd make millions of dollars, he'd boast.
So he goes to a lake
There to cut into his cake
And returned only for the girl he loved most!

"Shucks!" Chid grinned to himself wryly. "Thirty dollars! And I made fifty in ten minutes once just writing down names for Mr. Driddle. I

reckon I better not get going on these ambitions of mine again. You can't make 'em come true without money, and when you got money you don't need the ambition. Get on, hoss—that thunder squall is ringing right up."

Chid was suddenly aware of a woman standing in the road ahead, her arms outspread to stop the carriage. She was middle-aged, reminding him somehow of Mrs. Tatum, and she was scared. Chid could see that in his first look.

"Mister, mister! Pull up. The Lord sent you," she cried.

"Ma'am," said Chid and pulled the nag to a stop. "Ma'am, what's the trouble?"

Chapter Thirteen

TONK SLINKER AND Culver Coons moved cautiously over the deserted deck of the *Ariel*. The gunboat lay alongside a lakestone mole, creaking gently against her breasting booms. The riggers had gone to the Cascade yard in answer to the cook's triangle. Tonk and Culver had decided that what they planned to do was worth giving up supper for.

Tonk was a large pink boy of fifteen. He carried, by an iron reefing hook, a bucket of live charcoals stolen from the blacksmith's forge at the Cascade yard. His leather carpenter's apron was hitched around to his left hip to protect him from the intense heat of the sullen red fire in the metal pail. Culver carried a long rusted iron rod, sharpened to a blunt point. He, too, was a large boy, almost fat, but he was dark-complected, with flashing black eyes set wide apart under a shock of unruly jet-black hair.

"All clear below," Culver whispered to Tonk, who had remained on deck. "I reckon we can do it if we work fast, Tonk."

"God, if Carmody should catch us!" Tonk breathed.

"I ain't scared o' him," Culver grinned. "They took him up to Stone's this afternoon, yellor as a butter ball with the swamp vomit. It's Chid Alwyn I'm a-scared of."

"Well, don't be. He's gone downstate, him an' Nez."

"I know. But s'pposin' he ever takes a notion to lift o' them deck boards 'round the stem. He'd see for sure."

"Aw, let him. By Jesus, Cul, he ain't the on'y one's had a hand in buildin' this hooker. I reckon me an' you rate some, too."

They crept forward, stooped to avoid the deck beams, traversing the orlop deck. The smell of acrid new wood was heavy in the airless below-decks. Rope coils and piles of blocks, thimbles, and lignum-vitae dead

and heart eyes were strewn on the deck; lines on the stretch crisscross between the stanchions and mast buries, some partially wormed, parceled and served. The riggers would be back soon to continue their work under lantern light far into the night.

Tonk Slinker set the bucket down at the heel of the knighthead. Culver dashed his iron rod into the glowing coals. They tugged at the triangular flush hatch immediately aft of the solid, bulky oak stempiece, sliding it aft a few feet, exposing the stem clear to the keel scarf.

"Lord!" Tonk groaned, "how I hacked at this chunk! Chid wouldn't scarcely 'low me time to hone up my adze, he was that pushy. What d'you reckon they'll have him on now, Cul?"

"Dunno. I heard Lanny Hog say Chid was mentioned to take over in Carmody's place."

"What? Build a brig? Jes', Cul, one o' those'll be chosen for the flag-ship."

"I reckon," Tonk shrugged. "I on'y hope Chid picks me in his gang. He drives hell outen us, but, by Jes', Cul, he sure gets things done."

The iron rod was now red hot. Tonk wrapped a piece of sailcloth around the end and carried it gingerly to the deck opening.

He bent over on his knees, reaching into the tight wedge-shaped space. Carefully he burned into the oaken stempiece, several feet below the brand, "C. A. Mstr. Bldr. 1813," the initials—T. S.

"You want for me to burn yours in too, Cul?"

"Don't you dast," Culver growled. "Ain't nobody a-burnin' o' my initials but me. Hand up the irun."

The rod was heated again. Culver Coons reached into the space and again the sweetish smoke of scorched oak arose. C. C. C. Culver burned into the stempiece. The middle C was for Chauncey. But it was something that he kept quiet about. Chauncey was not a popular name around Presque Isle.

They replaced the floor hatch. Only Chid's initials, well above the deck, could be seen now. They crept again to the deck and threw the bucket of coals overside.

"By snook," Tonk grinned, "it kind o' makes me feel she's part mine now."

"I always felt that way," Culver said gravely, "but this kind o' binds it. Tonk, do you s'ppose we'll get a chance to fight her, too?"

"I ain't supposin', Cul. I'm goin' to. I wouldn't miss that sport for anythin'. Me an' Sylvester Tatro an' some o' the local boys've been drillin' with Real Taylor's Civilian Marine Brigade. We'll elect you in, you want."

"What do I have to do?"

"Jes' drill; gun drill, sail drill, general quarters drill. When the fleet's finished, we can join a ship."

"By jing, yes, Tonk. I ain't had all this hard labor an' starvation to be sent home an' miss the real fun. Does Chid belong?"

"No, he's in the Civilian Guard."

"Well, count me in. Hark, Tonk—what was that?"

They both listened intently. A gun had boomed far across the bay. As they listened another sounded.

"That was the watchtower on the peninsula, Cul."

"No!"

"By Goddy, 'twas. That's the alarm. Come on, Cul, you're elected into the Brigade right this minute. Jes', I hope it's the British at last!"

Antoine sat with his stockinged feet in the brick chimney oven in the kitchen of his friend Baptiste Bodette. Baptiste was a French-Canadian, a wizened aging man, who had crossed the lake from what was now the town of Lacolle many years ago. He had come to get away from war and the cold. He had found the American side only slightly warmer. Even on a warm, sultry day like this Baptiste found the fire pleasant. He thought the American climate much more agreeable to his grapes. But war was with him always.

He raised grapes for a living and was the only grower west of the Finger Lakes, where grapes, especially those of the red varieties, did so marvelously. He sold a few fresh grapes in the Erie markets and sent some to the south when the rivers permitted. But he turned most of his crop into wine, a sweet-sour red wine, unlike anything European, yet with a lingering delightful taste and a rich body which made the limited gallonage of the winery always eagerly sought after.

Antoine sipped some of that wine now, raising his glass first to his

host. Baptiste nodded sleepily. Since chance had directed a fellow Canadian to his fireside, his evenings had become more pleasant than he had ever known them. He and Antoine were already fast friends.

Baptiste had just concluded a story, the one in which the parish priest of St. Evariste had freed the spirit of one of his flock from the animal body of the dread Le Loup Garou.

"Ah t'ink," nodded Antoine thoughtfully, "is good wolfs story, dat."

"Werewolf, mon ami," corrected Baptiste. "She is badder."

"Oui. She remin' me, dat story, on what happen to hol' fran' from me. Long tam 'go, Ba'tis', but Ah t'ink Ah could remembre."

"O, tell, Antoine. Bon fran' wit' de fire—Mon Dieu, is what can be more better dan de hol' country story den."

"Honly de drank wit' hims. Ho, Ba'tis'—you' glass she have de leak, Ah d'clare."

"Pardon, pardon!" Baptiste murmured and hastened to fill Antoine's wine glass.

Baptiste dearly loved a story. He believed very few of them, even the ones he told himself. But the truth of them was unimportant. Listening was a pleasant pastime, and he fancied that life in Mother France, where he never had been, might be like this: a friend, a flagon of mellow wine, and unending pleasant conversation. Men like himself, he often reasoned, found in conversation, in spoken story and anecdote and debate, what those who could read found in books. His wife, before she had died two years ago, had been an excellent storyteller and, more important, an even more excellent listener.

How very fortunate, therefore, that Antoine Marestière had come partially to take her place. If only this American war did not descend upon him. He had seen war for most of his life, French, British, Indians, the American Revolution; had been on its fringes for as long as he could remember, always fleeing before it. War hovered again. And again he was ready should it envelope him.

"You mentioned de story, Antoine."

"Ah! Wall, Ba'tis'. Ho, now Ah'll tell 'bou' de wolfs what come fo' de life o' dat fran'. She was a trapper, dat fran', nam' Marcel, an' she have de trap line deep in de hwoods, way away f'um de town whar Ah was leetly boy, long tam 'go. Ah see dat Marcel plenty tam in summer—but

nevaire whan de fur is prime an' de wissels an' martin an' fox is hongry. Non! Marcel, he live by hisself den, in de leetly log soddy-shack an' hall day long dat feller trap an' trap. Honly wance, mebbe two tams, hall winter, whan de flour bar'l get low an' de heart cry much fo' de swit womans an' de dance, come dat feller hout to de town.

"We have not see him fo' one mont', mebbe two mont'. Is long tam', dat, in de hwoods, alone, Ba'tis', an' sometam feller she go crazy, hein? You t'ink mah fran' Marcel go crazy? Bah; Non, dat brave feller, no! But she have trouble—mais oui, tr-r-rouble!

"One col' day Marcel scratch de haid an' say, 'Bah Gar, jes' look on dat flour. Is no. Is tam near hall gone. Jes' Chris', an' look on dat bacon, dar ants none an' dar ants none co'n needer. *Diable à quatre*, Marcel, Ah t'ink you shak de hass an' catch hup some mo' grub, but queek.' An' mah fran' put on fo' de snowshoes an' tak de gun an' he t'ink he go to town fo' grub b'fo' he starve hisself dead.

"But, dat feller do not go. Non! Houtside de doo' dat feller see de wolfs, hongry skinny wolfs, hall wit' de tongue rollin' an' de teet' mak' white spit, wit' hangry an' wit' hunger; hall want to heat hup mah hol' fran'. Marcel, he see one grea' biggly wolfs, mebbe de capt'n o' dem hall. 'Ho,' say Marcel, an' raise hup dat musket to shoot, 'Ah t'ink, bah Je', you die an' den dar be no mo' trouble.' But Marcel nevaire shoot. Befo' he mak' de beat—pouff! De odder wolfs come 'round de back, an' on de flank, an' dey nips an' snaps. Pooty soon mah fran' is surroun', pooty soon mah fran' is island, lak in de St. Lawrence, wit' white water surroun' hims—honly de white water is wolfs. Hall 'round is nozzing but wolfs. Ho! Mah fran' go in dat doo' queek, lak fast—Ba'tis', lak hell!

"What to do? Hall night long dat feller t'ink an' t'ink. Hall nex' day, he t'ink, too. He is hongry. De grub she is gone. Dar is nozzing in de shack, nozzing, nozzing, no whar he look, nozzing. So he t'ink some mo', hard lak anyzing, an' always houtside dat doo' he hear de wolfs—gr-r-r-r! Ar-r-r-r! Mra-a-a-a! O, honderts wolfs! Hall de wolfs in Quebec come to heat hup mah fran'."

Antoine paused and nodded significantly at his glass. But Baptiste was spellbound. He did not notice.

"She leak some mo', mon ami," Antoine hinted.

"Pardon, oh, pardon," Baptiste apologized and hastily refilled Antoine's glass. "Le bon Dieu spare you' fran', hein?"

"Non, mah fran' do dat hisself, Ba'tis'. Y'on'erstan' dat Marcel is ver' hongry? Y'on'erstan' dat she does not wish to be heat hup by wolfs? Oui, is good, dat. So—wall, Marcel, he t'ink an' he t'ink an' she is mos' nearly a wik gone by. Oh, is dat feller hongry! So he t'ink one mo' tam an'—voila! He have hit!

"Mah fran' do not shoots, non! He do not lay hisself down to die, non! You know what she do, him? Bah Gar, dat brave feller he tak de beeg long coil rope f'um de hook an' den he sit down by dat col' stove what she has nozzing to cook on an' he ritch fo' hees skin' knife an' he mak de littly deep cut, right in his laig. Is not much bloody lef'; tam leetly, Ba'tis', but is enough so mah fran' mak de teeny bloody spot on dat rope, ever' half meter, hall de way to de hend. Oh, dat feller is wik, wit' dizzy; terrible! But she go to do doo' an' she hopen him, jes' littly crack, an' she rare back an' she slang dat whole rope way away into de hwoods an' she honly tie de wan hend in de shack.

"Such a t'ing! Mon Dieu! Dem wolfs sniff an' dey sniff' an' den—pouff, dem bad hanimals fin' dat rope wit' de bloody o' mah fran' freshly hon it. Ever' goddam wolfs take bite on dat rope! ever' wolfs! One half meter apart. An' day not le' go, Ba'tis', oh, non, not dem mad hongry wolfs. She hol' on, tight wit' de teet', growlin' an' gnashin'—an' hall mah good hol' fran' do is pull dem wolfs to hims an' kill hims one at de tam wit' de hax."

Antoine drained his glass and rose, sliding into his moccasins.

"You b'lieve, Ba'tis', hein?"

"*Mais oui*, Antoine, of course."

"Wall, den Ah'll tell you de tru'. Ba'tis', mon ami, Ah say him lak dat so you not feel badder. Dat feller Marcel, hol' fran', is me, Antoine Paul Marestièrè!"

"Of course, of course. Why did dis dumbhead not suspect? Antoine, mo' better you have some wine, hein?"

"Merci," Antoine nodded. "Is mo' better story wit' de wine."

He was just about to raise the sweet, strong wine to his lips when a dull shot echoed from the direction of Presque Isle bay. Baptiste looked at him in sudden panic, then wearily removed a brick from the hearth.

A small iron sap pot lay in the hiding place. It was sealed over with beeswax, all except a small slot, into which the old man could slip his saved coins.

"Again it comes," he sighed without anger, "*la guerre*. Ah t'inks she is tam to move again, Antoine."

Antoine helped the old man load his low, small-wheeled vineyard wagon. There was not much to load, a rope bed, a chest of drawers, a toolbox, a bronze crucifix in a deep bolectioned walnut frame with Gothic-arched cabinet doors, and the iron sap pot. They buried the vineyard tools and the few wine kegs. The goat and its kid they tethered to the wagon. Baptiste Bodette lifted himself tiredly to the plank seat. He did not speak except to murmur a low good-by to his new friend.

The arbors stood in neat, terraced rows on the sunny sidehill above the plain log cabin, the pale leaves catching the lowering sunlight, the new green bunches of fruit dusty with a reddish light. To the northward, beyond the supper-fire smoke of Erie the lake sparkled. Far on the horizon two tiny white sails hung as if suspended between heaven and earth.

Antoine turned toward Presque Isle, shutting out the sound of the retreating wagon wheels. About halfway to the town he met another wagon, horses lathered, heading south. Only a leather trunk and three frightened children were in the box behind the woman who drove. A dog trotted under the wagon, eyes rheumy from the road dust. Between there and the naval storehouse where the Civilian Marine Brigade was forming ragged ranks, he met three other wagons. All carried frightened, fleeing people.

Mais oui, la guerre had come.

The woman who stopped Chid on the Waterford Turnpike could hardly talk. She was out of breath and stumbled to the carriage. Chid jumped to the road and offered his arm. She took it gratefully. Chid felt the shaking of her.

"Take it easy, ma'am. Nothing's chasing you, is there?"

"No. I got away before they came. I heard their horrible whooping and screeching in the brush before they got to the clearing. They're going to burn down our house."

"Who?"

"Indians. Scads of 'em. They're on the warpath."

"No Indians here would be on the warpath," Chid said. "Did they bother you?"

They had not. Nor had they seen her run for it. Her name was Maggie Baxter. She and her husband had cleared an interval meadow in the Donation District some rods in from the turnpike and built themselves a slab cabin and a barn. She had been there alone when the Indians had come howling in from the west. Some were on ponies; others on foot. They were armed and nasty, and as she had peeped from her concealment in the underbrush beyond the hay lot, she saw that they were kindling a fire. Mrs. Baxter reckoned she knew what that meant.

"I expect they're just sporting, ma'am," Chid reassured her. "They're like going on to Erie."

"First they'll touch off the house—it's their natcher," the woman wailed. "I was trying to get word to the tollgate. They might make trouble in town, and I thought to warn 'em."

"I don't think they will. They probably just want food."

"An' likkor too. Injuns always want likkor."

"I'll go up," Chid said.

He took Nez's jug. He reckoned they were after liquor, all right. He expected he knew who they were. He plunged into the dark woods, keeping the patches of light sky to his right. When he came to the edge of the clearing, he saw the fire. It was a loose blaze of tops, under control, and silhouetted against the leaping flames he could see the figures of the Indians. Most of them sat docilely on the ground. A few danced and jumped, like mechanical puppets, and from time to time emitted half-hearted whoops and yells. Chid approached boldly, making no pretense of concealment. None of the Indians bothered him, though they all eyed the jug with calculation.

"Where's your chief?" Chid asked a painted dancing brave.

"Um!" Chid could follow the man's pointing.

A group of ancient Indians huddled together near the fire. They ate from their warbags, chewing the dried, leathery meat and parched corn slowly, making it seem like a feast. It surprised Chid to see that they

were in war paint. But only the very young men behaved in a warlike manner, brandishing old Revolution muskets. They were not very convincing.

"Chief," Chid said. "Head man."

"Corn-Eater; here." A wizened, stooped Indian unfolded his blanket, baring his naked chest, on which was painted his totem. Chid had heard of the man. His renegade tribe was one of those which so far had not gone either British or Yankee. He guessed that the two Indians who had soberly watched the launching of the *Ariel* had gotten word to the Corn-Eater.

"Hurry," Chid said, making his words slowly. "'Merican captain needs the chief tonight. At Erie; big feast." He wished that Nez had been in shape to handle this. He felt inadequate. Nez knew about these matters better than did he.

"Want Corn-Eater, must feed." The chief nodded toward the rude Baxter shanty."

"Too poor," Chid said. "At Erie big food, big camp for great chief. Go away from here, chief. Bad food here." Chid presented the jug. The Corn-Eater sniffed at it, then he took a long gurgling draught. "More at Erie. Go now," Chid urged.

Chid didn't care what he promised. Some of the young men, he was afraid, might work themselves into a raid on the house. It was a miserable, dilapidated shack, but it was somebody's dream. The Baxters probably had their life's savings in the place. The land itself he knew had been free, one of the many Donation District tracts given by the land-poor states in lieu of hard money to the veterans of the Revolution.

The Corn-Eater shook a gourd rattle, and the dancing ceased abruptly. There was some mild objection among the younger braves and a disposition to remain for the feast of dog. Two Indians were preparing to brain the Baxter watch dog, a large, shabby cow driver. But without further word the Corn-Eater climbed into a contraption made of the hind wheels of a small buggy upon which the original box and seat were precariously balanced, and a young Indian boy led the horse over the furrowed meadow toward Erie. The ragged braves followed docilely, their warlike antics suddenly quelled. The last Chid saw of the chief was the flash of the jug bottom in the flame light.

Two young bucks still idled near the house, eying the low, open sash. The dog, released, barked and nipped at their bare heels, worrying them. Chid walked boldly between them and into the cabin. He felt his way to the fireplace and reached for the musket that he knew must be there. It was an antique French-lock, probably of little use save as a cudgel, but Chid stood in the doorway and brandished it, and the two Indians disappeared with ludicrous suddenness in the direction the Corn-Eater's tribe had taken.

The cabin was all right; nothing had been touched. Chid stamped out the brush fire, then whistled in the cow dog and made his way back to the carriage. It was full dark now. The thunder had lessened, as if the storm were waiting to ride the night breeze in from the lake. Mrs. Baxter's gratitude was overwhelming. It embarrassed Chid until he realized that the woman was on the edge of hysterics.

"I'll take you to the tollhouse, ma'am," Chid said, clucking to the nag. "Mr. Brown's your nearest neighbor, I take it."

"God bless you, young man. I never thought I'd see the dog again. Those heathens grabbed him first thing. My husband depends on Barnabus . . . it's his name, young man, the dog's I mean . . . he's a flatboater, and the dog knows every riffle here to the Forks of the Ohio. He don't miss a one, and it kind of keeps my man from wrecking—I mean Barnabus's barking him awake when the boat's just drifting. My man's in Erie today. He'll fetch me at the tollhouse; you leave me there."

Chid said he would. Mr. Brown, when his waving lantern brought Chid's horse up at the gate, was agitated. "Them damned louts o' the Corn-Eater's," he growled, "used the road till forty rods south, an' then scooted 'round back o' me. Nary a copper toll did I c'lect from 'em."

He was glad to care for Mrs. Baxter, and figured that her husband might be along any minute to take her home. "You done her a right good turn," Mr. Brown said. "Ain't you the shipbuilder?"

"A-yep. Alwyn's the name, Chidsy Alwyn."

"Pleased to meet yuh, Mr. Alwyn." Mr. Brown shook hands, and for some unaccountable reason Mrs. Baxter did likewise. "Mr. Baxter'll be powerful grateful. He's a fine gent. You ought to remain by to meet up with him."

"I was figuring to stay here till that thunder squall passed over, Mr. Brown."

"Welcome. I figured sure we'd get it by now, but it kind o' eased off after sunset. That ain't a nach'rel storm, Mr. Alwyn; there ain't the right feel in the air, an' stormheads was missin' at sunset."

"We better get my friend in," Chid said. "He ate something didn't set right, I guess."

"So did them damn' Indians," Mr. Brown said wryly, "et it right outen a stun jug, Mr. Alwyn."

"They had a gallon," Chid admitted. "I gave it to them so they'd leave Mrs. Baxter's place alone."

"Well, a gallon won't make more'n one Indian drunk 'cause only one Indian'll get at the jug. Them savages swill likkor like water, but they can't hold it worth a hoot—they either fight or fall asleep."

They sat on the dusty stubbled sward in front of the tollhouse waiting for the storm to break. But the thunder gradually thinned out, and after a while it could not be heard at all.

A lone figure came walking swiftly from the direction of Erie. They could hear his tuneless whistle a long way off in the dark. Barnabus suddenly stiffened and whined. "I cal'ate that's Azial," Mrs. Baxter said tremulously and sighed as if a burden had been removed from her shoulders. Behind the figure distant wagon wheels creaked.

Chid shook hands with the man. He could not see him very well, but he sensed that he was a giant. His hand grip hurt.

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Alwyn," Baxter said in a deep bearlike growl. "Maggie, what in creation's ailin' o' you? Yer shakin' like a whupped puppy."

"I be scared, Azial; plumb scared."

She began telling him about the Indians. He listened with concern. Chid could see his big hamlike hand creep around her waist, drawing her toward him. She was telling her husband about stopping Chid on the road when the wagon drew up to the tollgate.

"Halt!" Mr. Brown cried. "Goldurn yuh, cain't you see that lantren spang in the middle o' the road?"

Baptiste Bodette grunted, and his bony horse came to a tired stop.

Mr. Brown's lantern revealed the old Frenchmen's weary face, the loaded household goods in the vineyard wagon.

"Movin', be you?"

"*La guerre*," Baptiste said thinly. "She comes again. Ah go, me, monsieur."

"Well, go, whatever the hell's a-chasin' o' you. The toll's twenty cents, mister, plus five fer the goat."

Baptiste shook his iron sap pot until the copper coins fell into the circle of lantern light on the plank seat. Mr. Brown picked out his toll fee and waved the wagon on. Baptiste made a muddy sucking in his throat, and the horse plodded on toward Waterford.

"Now, what's a-eatin' on Bodette?" he mused aloud. "By gum, he's got a handsome good crop a-comin' up to the lake shore. What in snum's a 'la gare,' Azial? You reckon that ol' coot's got a woman drivin' on him?"

No telling, Azial opined. Them Canucks was funny critters. Over to York State and Vermont they was a real problem, like the Injuns here and the niggers was getting to be to the south'ard.

Chid led Nez to the carriage. It was obvious that the storm had blown itself out over the lake. And he did not relish listening to Mrs. Baxter's hysterical praise again.

He said good night and whipped up the horse. He wanted to get to the sentry post fast to tell Real Taylor about those Indians. Somebody would have to feed them or there would be trouble. After all, if the Corn-Eater was coming as an ally at last, it would be policy to treat him as one. That meant above all a welcome of food and liquor upon arrival.

But at the post only a vacant-eyed civilian dozed beside the stacked muskets. The man said Lieutenant Taylor had taken his boys and gone to the bay about six o'clock. "Kind o' excited, they was," he mentioned, "an' loaded fer bear. Don't ast me why—them Navy fellers don't tell nuthin'. Injuns, mister? Dang it, so that's what that there whooping was a spell back. I shoul'da knowed it. Injuns, yes, sir! It sounded like some o' the boys fum Stone's out sportin' or mebbe drivin' varmints."

Chid drove on. On the south-bound road, from which his own cart path was separated by the swampy hummocks of Murderer's Swale, he thought he heard several wagons passing toward the tollhouse.

He felt defeat and hopelessness again. It seemed always that the bright

spots were offset so sharply by the failures and the stupidities. An hour ago he had felt a keen sense of triumph as he thought of those arks which could bring up the missing stores and guns and so easily solve the desperate problem of equipping the fleet. Now the bright hope was shadowed by the recollection of the drunken Corn-Eater and his loot-bent tribe, and this careless and indifferent civilian sentry. Folks needed, as Mr. Brown had said gravely back in Portersville, to be hurt. Only then would they realize that the danger threatening was real; that war was not a vast picnic.

Nez stirred as the first houses of Erie loomed darkly in the night.

"You want me to drive?" Nez asked. "I feel some clearer now, Chid."

"Nope; we're most to Erie."

As soon as the dense forest gave way to the first cleared patch beyond which was the village, Chid slowed the rig. He turned off from the shipyard road opposite the Erie Hotel and entered a rutted clay road between tall arching chestnuts. At a square clapboarded house set in a neat clipped lawn he stopped and tied the horse to an iron ring in a tool-marked square stone post.

"It's French Street," Chid said, jumping to the sod. "Buehler's house. I got to let Noah Brown or Captain Perry know about those arks. If they'll buy 'em, our troubles will be over. We can control the whole supply line, and there won't be stuff thrown ashore on Bad Woman's Island when those flatboaters get to feeling greedy. You wait."

The Buehler house surprised Chid. It was furnished with a quiet, rich elegance that bespoke wealth and culture. It reminded him of Mrs. Tatum's home. There was the same awesome softness of deep-pile carpeting, and the dull gleam of mahogany and rosewood. In the cool hall a pendulum clock, the movement a recent invention of Eli Terry of Chid's own state, clucked in solemn measured beat. It was disconcerting, finding such elegance in this wilderness. But there was a promise in it, too, as if he had suddenly come upon a pattern for that dwelling house which, in his dreams, stood under shade trees behind the shipyard.

"Captain Perry ain't hyar, suh," said the black who answered Chid's knock.

"Mr. Brown, then. I must see one or the other."

"Him neither, suh. Dey bofe gone to wah."

"What war!"

"De British wah, suh. Two dey ships come dis eb'nin' an' commence bangin' away at de shipya'ds, suh. Ain't you hear' de firin'?"

"Firing?"

"Yassuh. Dey shoot eve'thin' to hell an' gone, suh. Folks done all run to de sou' kentry. De M'rine Brigade an' de ships' builders done try an' keep dem f'm landin' now, suh."

"I thought it was thunder, all the way coming from Waterford. Did they hurt the ships?"

"Dunno, suh. All Ah do is keep looksin' till hit come off dahk. But dey's powerful heaps o' smoke down by de bay. Cap'n ain't got nowhere near 'nough sojers, suh. He cuss dat Commodore Chauncey good an' proper, but Ah don't reckon dat fotch him de men he need."

"What's your name?"

"LeGrand Quimby, suh."

"Do you know me?"

"Yessuh. You's de man what build de *Ariel* schoonah, suh. Cap'n Perry mention you galore. He say do he have two mo' men lak you an'..."

"Never mind. Did you ever feed ninety Indians?"

"Neber, suh."

"Well, you're going to, LeGrand. I can keep them off for about an hour. After that you have your people ready with all the chickens and roast hog you can lay your hands on."

Chid went to the door. He called Nez into the house.

"You know this man, LeGrand?"

"No, suh. He look lak de man what wuk 'long wid you, on'y dat man he have whuskers, suh. Look, Ah don' lak do all dis..."

"I guess you know him. He's going to watch to see that you do exactly as I told you. You better do it, LeGrand. Mr. Nott will see that you do."

"I don't know nuthin' about it, Chid," Nez said, "I been kind o' sleepin'."

Chid hated to waste the time, but he hurriedly explained the situation.

It was all-fired queer, where shipbuilding led a man—to flatboats, an insidious lake fever, renegade Indians; a man had to know a lot more than merely handling tools to build ships. "Throw your knife for 'em,

Nez," Chid said. "Send to Stone's for a keg of dunder; make a speech; do anything until Real Taylor or someone comes back from the bay. The Corn-Eater's been dawdling over that gallon. But he'll fetch town by the pike any minute now. Head him down here to Buehler's barn and keep LeGrand's people feeding him and his tribe."

"Ninety Indians ain't so important, Chid."

"It's ninety that ain't British. I guess that's the way Captain Perry would look at it."

"Mas' Alwyn," the black said with sudden respect, "Ah reckon de cap'n want me to do dis, suh."

"I reckon he'd whip you if you didn't," Chid said; "and lock up the dog if you've got one."

"Yessuh! Mas' Alwyn, de Sackett's Ha'bah runner fotched a letteh fo' you, suh. Mas' Brown say sen' hit to ..."

"Give it over."

It was from Mary. He thrilled to the small, intimate handwriting. Like the words it formed, it was for him alone, not to be read now. He reckoned Nez and the Buehler servants could take care of the Indians. That was important. But not as important as the *Ariel*.

Even now she might be needing him, might be hurt by the mighty gunfire which distance had made sound so like a terrific lake storm.

Chid ran as fast as he could to the shipyard on the bay. For the first time that he could remember since he had been in Erie, he could feel genuine anger, blind, hot anger, for that enemy across the lake.

They had, at last, hurt.

Chapter Fourteen

As CHID PLUNGED through the dense black forest, he had the distinct feeling, mounting almost to a conviction, that he was on the brink of impending events of tremendous portent. He could not say why. His awareness was without reason. But it lay on his belly like a dreadful apprehension, and seemed to urge him on to hurry.

He could recall nothing of particularly ominous significance having occurred during the long weeks at Presque Isle. Thinking back upon the period, he recollected only the eternal physical weariness of it. The days, until this one, had been but hours of endless hard work. He had driven his muscles to the limit of their endurance by daylight, and his mind to throbbing dullness far into each night. Only seldom, usually between the time he at last laid himself down and the moment of closing his eyes in dreamless animal-like sleep, had he thought of himself or his ambitions. He hoarded his thoughts of these like a child with sugar candies, saving them until the end of the day, then found himself always too tired and too sleep-hungry to enjoy them.

Today Chid had found real rest, far away from the cares of the shipyard; away from the endless problems of building the *Ariel*, of obtaining or improvising her fittings, of meeting and defeating the growlings of his gang, who were as weary as he himself. It seemed that he had personally, and oftentimes physically, to fight for every spike and tool and bit of forge work and loyalty that the schooner required. Only a week ago he had had to threaten old Paph North with dismissal for his eternal complaining. One bright day in early spring, he had had to lick Tonk Slinker for stealing to the pool above the Cascade Falls for an hour of swimming and loafing. All the while Chid himself would have given

anything to plunge into the cool beckoning depths of the stream and forget the staggering tasks he had undertaken.

His own loyalty to the task and to Noah Brown and Captain Perry was something that he did not attempt to rationalize. The problem, the dragon to be slain, was personalized for Chid in the *Ariel*. She had had to be built, quickly and completely and well, and he was seldom aware of the larger meanings of his struggle. In a vague way, hardly to be characterized as patriotic consciousness, he sensed the threat of the British and their Indian allies to the country. But he was never blind to the fact that by defeating this enemy the lake would be kept open. In that way only would it become the safe region that it must become in order for him to build the ships he dreamed of, to build that home and career and fortune. Always Chid had to reason and understand in such terms. As a boy, these things had been but words of brave boasting; now they were yearnings. Something deep within him demanded that these yearnings be satisfied, that the practical steps toward their fulfillment be taken whenever opportunity offered.

In a way, he had been living a dual life. Always he was impatient for the end of the actual one which he was living, that of building Captain Perry's fleet. Yet he could not, by nature and training and his deep love of his trade, abandon that life until the job was complete. But at all times, like a sleeping thing within him, that driving dream was present. Though he did not think about it directly for days at a time, it was always there to color and flavor and influence almost his every deed and thought. At times it came to the fore and was in sharp conflict with the motives of the moment.

Chid was untroubled by any precise moral considerations. He was a realist and slightly bitter. He was sure that he wanted nothing but what everybody else wanted. He differed from most only in that he knew positively what that was, and that he would have to go after it alone. It would not come as the reward of patience or of prayerful hope, blind loyalty or patriotism to any cause or any person. He had seen the truth of that amply demonstrated many times.

Of one thing he was certain. He knew now that he loved Mary; that she had become in some strange manner—perhaps because of the very

leagues between them—real and desirable and dear. He realized that in her quiet, rich way she loved him, that she had for many years.

His love for her was not a thing of complete beauty yet. Mary was, in part, still only a component of his plans, a part of the plant and structure. Chid was not blind to Mary as a woman; he never had been. But he was apt, too often, to think of her as merely peopling his home and his establishment. But as the expiration of his apprenticeship drew nearer, Chid became more and more aware of the physical fact of Mary; that at no very distant time she would be intimately with him as his wife. Mary reached each day further beyond that reason and sense and stubborn rationality which were both the curse and the blessing of Chid's nature; each day she reached deeper into his heart. And Chid, thrilling to the strangeness of it, treasured the new emotion and drew from it much of the reason and motivation which he must always require.

But in these good things Chid could find no cause for his disturbing apprehension now.

He went to the gunboat yard first. The *Ariel* was a dark shadow against the blackness of the night, her taut new rigging gently humming in the cooling night breeze. The two other schooners were still not launched. One of them, Chid realized, studying the shadows, had capsized. She lay on her port side, canted against the earth gully on the floor of which the wooden ways had been laid. The damp, evil smell of the rotting shore vegetation pervaded the night, and mixed with it was the acrid odor of burned wood, of destruction by fire.

"Who goes there?"

Chid started. It was unusual to find a sentry on yard duty; even more unusual to find a sentry alert.

"Chid Alwyn . . . friend. Who are you?"

"Bosun O'Leary o' Taylor's command. Where you headin', Mr. Alwyn?"

"To my office, I reckon. I'm a builder."

"I know. But, cripes, you ain't got much of an office no more. Them British blasted her roof off almost the fust broadside."

"Did they hurt the schooners?"

"They holed yours, Mr. Alwyn. But they shot the stocks out from under the *Scorpion*, an' she's laid herself down like you see. They're after the brigs mostly, I guess.

"Did they do any damage?"

"Damage! Hell, yes! The whole Cascade yard is a shambles. Busted up the rigger's storehouse, they did, an' shot so much cannister into the stockpiles they look like tinder bark heaps."

"They were right in the bay?"

"Damn right they were. One still is. Came through the channel an' cuss the peninsula guns. I dunno how many hot-shot broadsides we took. They was fires aplenty, and whilst we was quenchin' them, the British landed a couple o' boats full o' marines and such down west of Cascade. Perry an' Taylor held them into a gully, got 'em there yet—but an orderly jest went up to town to turn out every damn' human in pants. The British is landin' with two more boats. We don't hold 'em, Mr. Alwyn, we can say good-by to every ship in the bay, I reckon."

"A lot in Erie have skedaddled, I hear," Chid said bitterly.

"I reckon. Folks never took this war serious till it come. But, by God, they will now, Mr. Alwyn. Say, Cap'n Taylor was lookin' for you."

"I'm looking for him, too. What did he want?"

"He thought you should see what can be done for the *Ariel*, case she's holed under the water. Noah Brown got himself a splinter in the gut, and George Carmody's to Stone's with the lake fever bad. Cap'n Taylor's west with the Brigade."

Chid struck fire to a sap-pine flare and made a quick inspection of the gunboat. She was unhurt except for one hole in the bow. A thirty-two-pound ball had caught her fair on the stem, directly under the bowsprit. The great piece of oak was split asunder above the waterline, and the wood face upon which only yesterday he had so proudly burned his initials and the legend: Mstr. Bldr. 1813, was a ragged torn surface of furry splinters.

It made Chid thoroughly angry. That ball was a personal insult, a personal defiance. It had been fired at Chidsy Alwyn. It had ruined the slim graceful beauty of that smooth level bow of the *Ariel*. It had destroyed a part of that which was composed of his own aching muscles and bitter sweat and sacrifice.

Looking at that exploded mass of torn and twisted wood, Chid felt that he had been hurt, had been wounded, as surely as if it was his own flesh which had been pierced by British iron. He knew that he would

never rest content until this deed had been avenged, until the *Ariel* was again made whole and was manned by angry hearts like his own, and had returned this hurt a hundredfold.

He thought that he ought to report to his post with the Civil Guard. But his real job was ships, not guard duty. The Cascade hulls, too, might need him. And he would have to get Real Taylor or someone to take care of those Indians before they stalked off feeling insulted or neglected and march northwest to Tecumseh and the British.

He ran to the brig ways. The long hand-hewn backbone had sprung ribs since morning; stout oak frames reached into the night like crooked fingers. He could see no damage.

Candlelight gleamed from the slab laying-out shanty. There were men inside. Beyond, to the westward, he could hear ragged musket fire around the gully beyond which was the site he had picked for his shipyard.

"Gangway, mister."

Chid let the stretcher pass. Two surgeon's mates carried it. He thought the figure on it looked like Orlando Hog. Chid went to the shanty. He had to find Taylor, or Captain Perry. The newly arrived Navy doctor was working over a naked body strapped to the plank designing table. The wound was in the shoulder, at the socket joint. Small wooden clips protruded from the mass of mashed flesh; purplish blood bubbled in a muddy ooze all about the doctor's quick flashing knife.

"The saw, mate. And give him a gag to chew on."

"Aye, aye, Dr. Parsons."

The doctor's gold naval braid flashed beneath the long linen apron flecked with frothed blood. The saw was a beautiful tool, with perfect teeth perfectly sharpened and set, about like one which Chid would select for joiner work or for building a fancy captain's gig. Dr. Parsons used the saw beautifully, too—no fumbling, no false cuts.

The wounded man was a rigger, a Philadelphia redemptioner, with a stupid Irish face. The soggy leather gag was clenched in his broken teeth. The straps creaked suddenly, cut deeply into the tough, arching flesh of the man's abdomen.

Chid got out of the shanty. As he stepped into the suddenly chilly night, again he heard the Irisher scream, a long horrible bubbling cry

that echoed against the forest like the cry of some unmentionable demon, like the death scream of a werewolf.

He stumbled upon a covered unmoving bundle in the new soft grass. Beyond it were more bundles, some not covered. None moved. Looking carefully, in the faint light from the shanty sash, Chid saw that one of the bundles was Tonk Slinker. There was a smile on his face, a cold bloodless but contented smile.

A bat flitted over him. Chid struck at it frantically. He almost tripped over another of the yielding bundles.

He went on to the westward, to where he could still hear the steady ripple of musket fire. He felt weak, physically sick, as he had felt on the *Blessed Cause* during that awful fight on the gory decks. But somehow it was different. He was part of that fight—killing, defending, avenging . . .

Out on the bay he saw a dancing light, heard the silvery shrill of bosun's pipes, then the thin wail of sheets and braces being overhauled through blocks. He supposed that the British ship waited out there for the raiding party to return.

A man detached himself from the gloom. Beyond him were other men, walking backward, firing into the darkness. Bullets whined overhead, like angry bees, winging straight.

"Chid!"

"Real! Can't—can't you hold?"

"We haven't the men, Chid. They're pushing us hard. I'm supposed to protect Perry's flank, but they've got us outnumbered bad."

"Isn't there anything you can do?"

"Yes, fight while we can. They've landed two cannon, Chid. All hell will break loose soon."

"I—I think I can get help, Real."

"I don't know where. But if you can, for Christ's sake, do it!"

He didn't know if the idea would work. The trouble would be the Corn-Eater and his braves. They might, with usual Indian logic, refuse now to do the very thing they had set out to do. He hoped that Nez had plied them well with liquor. A drunken Indian was likely to be brave and boastful and daring.

Chid set off for the Buehler house again at a dead run. He stumbled through the brush, heedless of the tearing brambles and the twisted snag

roots that upset him every few yards. He saw at last the glow of a great fire between the trees. The Indians were dancing around it again, screeching and whooping wildly. Chid thought it looked like a colorful child's play at a picnic that had gotten out of hand. Individuals strutted without audience. A military drum in the hands of a battered old man beat out a stuttering rhythm; some group chanted a monotonous guttural song. The Corn-Eater sat on his comical vehicle, screaming commands and orders to which nobody gave attention.

"Are they drunk?" Nez repeated. "Chid, due to a slight error, you might say, they're plumb staggerin'! The Corn-Eater's boys unburied some Frenchie's wine casks on the way here. Then they raided Stone's an' gutted the place. I reckon every one o' the thievin' dog-eaters has got at least a keg."

"It's all right, Nez. Can you get them to the Cascade yard to fight?"

Nez thought it might take a special gift to the Corn-Eater: the old Indian could stand liquor better than his braves, and he wasn't so far addled that he would go off to fight for the pure sport of it. But the Corn-Eater shook his head at this wiry paleface who could throw knives so expertly and converse in an unknown Indian tongue, but, oddly, intelligible nevertheless.

"What is gift?" the Corn-Eater grunted.

"Food," Nez said, "a bran'-new skinnin' knife for every one o' you; plenty whisky for chief for long time."

"No gift," the Corn-Eater said sourly. "Money."

"He wants cash, Chid. The damned old sinner."

"How much?"

"Money," the Corn-Eater grunted, and took a drink from a jug. It was not the jug which Chid had given him.

"All right," Chid said.

He took out his sow's-ear purse. It jingled with coin and gave off a soft rustle of notepaper. It was all the money that Chid had in the world, his pay so far for building the fleet. It amounted to thirty-three dollars. Chid emptied the purse into the Corn-Eater's greedily cupped hands. He was glad that much of it was in coin. The Corn-Eater, fingering it eagerly, seemed interested in the copper and silver more than in the paper notes.

Their magic shrunk the old man's wrinkled face into a grinning toothless mask.

His gourd, the Corn-Eater's only voice of authority, rattled in sharp command. The chief stood in his rickety carriage and said a few staccato sentences. The cries of the dancing braves became suddenly hideous and portentous. The dance became wild and abandoned. The roasting pigs and fowl over the red pit were forgotten. A young warrior staggered to the roasting pit and removed a shoddy torn militia uniform coat and threw it into the fire. Then he unfolded a full war bonnet of eagle feathers and placed it, with drunken, fumbling fingers, upon his shaven head.

Presently, the Corn-Eater slid to the ground and snatched a musket from a near-by Indian. He made a throaty sound, like a crazy cackle—and his people suddenly became silent and stealthy and purposeful. One by one, following their chief, they were swallowed by the dark shadows of the great forest which bordered the lake.

Chid and Nez took the cart path on the bank edge. After a while they could hear the musket fire on the beach again. It was punctuated by the occasional boom of a field piece.

"The British must have landed their cannon," Chid said. "Nez, Real and Perry have got to know about the Corn-Eater. They might fire on him."

"Mostly I'm a-scared the Corn-Eater will fire on them," Nez said gravely. "He'll flank attack, from the cover of the woods. It won't be a nice thing to see, Chid."

"I reckon not. Nez, you're my witness to paying that money over. Thirty-three dollars. I expect it back."

"'Course, I'll witness for you. But Gosh knows when you'll ever see it the way items come into this condemned country. Chid, what in hell makes you think o' money at a time like this?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Chid snapped with sudden belligerence.

"Keep your hair flat," Nez grinned. "You're the damndest one when suthin' o' your own gets stepped on, Chid. Come on, we better cut for it."

Real Taylor's men were making a stand behind the skeleton frame of the number two brig. The forest stood deep and mysterious on the bank to their left. Perry and his frigate men held the shore buildings and the

saw pit to Taylor's right. Flashes of gunfire pricked the night ahead, like fireflies on a still summer evening. The field piece fired spasmodically; each time closer, as if the unseen British files were slowly creeping toward the defenders.

"If Perry'll fall back, and make out to seem druv," Nez offered in a whisper, "them British'll nacherly swarm into the pocket. You can hold 'em here, Real—an' meanwhile I'll sneak the bank an' have the Injuns close in from the west. We ought to have 'em bagged and clean into the lake in no time."

Taylor nodded. "Chid, can you pass the word to the cap'n? He's north, about thirty rods."

"Surely, Real. Will he take orders from—from you?"

"You don't know Perry, Chid," Real said with warm sincerity. "We're not cap'n and lieutenant in times like these. We're partners."

He watched Nez creep away to the woods. Then Chid passed along behind Taylor's ragged line, keeping low, out of the breast-high line of those whining British bullets. Once the cannon barked, and the near side of the forge shed collapsed. He could hear the brick forge hearth fall, the clang of the scattered tools and bar iron. A man at his feet suddenly threw his musket away with a tired sigh and reared up on his knees. The man coughed, deep and rattling, then quietly slid to the ground and lay still.

"Cap'n Perry," Chid addressed a moving blotch in the blackness. "Messenger to Cap'n Perry."

"This way, sonny. You carry any solution to this goddamn' mess, hurry fast. We can't hold for much longer, I swear!"

"Hang on," Chid whispered, "for just a mite yet."

He found Perry on his belly with his fighting seamen. They were cutlass and pike fighters, with small faith in muskets; anxious for the British to close for the hand-to-hand fighting which they knew. Chid's message to fall back was greeted with a muttered growl.

"Avast," Perry said in that unruffled arresting voice. "Save this fleet, my lads, and I'll promise you your chance to mix yet. Pass the word to fall back, Lieutenant Elliot; slowly—and fighting."

Somebody slid a straight heavy navy cutlass into Chid's hand. He wriggled slowly back a few yards. Ragged hindering fire was directed

at the British position on the beach. Lead thudded dully into the wooden buildings near by. Muffled orders sent small details of snipers into the lofts of these buildings, ready to pour fire upon the enemy when they advanced to this position. A bugle sounded suddenly from the English lines, terribly near.

"It's the advance," a man said at Chid's side. "If they only didn't have them durn field pieces! They're loadin' 'em with beach rubble."

A cannon charge cut into the trees and bushes above their heads, raining a shower of green leaves and small branches upon them. They took prone positions behind the buildings. Chid wondered when that rear attack of the Indians would occur. Already it seemed as if he had been crawling here in the damp clay for hours.

He could hear Taylor's line still firing. But it was to the left and ahead now, no longer on the flank. A leather bucket of water passed up from the lake, pausing as each man took a hasty drink. Chid reckoned that he was near the center of Perry's line. It was dark with the pitch-darkness of a mine. A frog suddenly croaked in a lull in the firing, and a youngster laughed shrilly, almost hysterically, like a woman.

Then suddenly Chid heard the blood-curdling yell of the Corn-Eater's drunken braves. It came from beyond Real Taylor's position, from the beach behind the British formation—a hideous pagan chorus of murder and torture.

A tenseness passed along the line. Chid felt his own grip on the cutlass tighten until his fingers hurt. Without thinking, he rose to a crouch, like a runner awaiting the signal to lunge forward.

"Steady!"

The British fire swung away from them. The bugle blared again. A drum rolled grimly. A man screamed off on the beachhead that had become a death trap; from the lake itself oars splashed as the British boats hurried in to take off the raiding party.

"Forward!"

Chid was immensely glad to dash to the charge at last, to end the awful suspense of waiting. There was not much to go by, only the crossed white tunic belts that always made the British such good targets. The night was suddenly full of hurrying slashing figures all pressing toward the

lake, all converging upon that desperate routed band. The Corn-Eater's men killed, bloodily and with savage joy; they took no prisoners.

The British were at the very water's edge now. Some dashed, waist-deep in the bay, for the boats. A file stood with hands upraised at the cliff base, completely surrounded. The Indians hacked cruelly at them with wooden lances, beat them down with musket butts. A seaman swung suddenly at Chid with a boarding pike. The hooked blade was almost upon him before Chid's wits cleared and he yelled, "Friend."

"Pardon, neighbor. You was nearly number four for me."

The man dashed on. A drunken Indian was stooped over a fallen British soldier, one hand clutching the wounded man's scalp, the other reaching for his belt knife. Chid put his cutlass point against the Indian's throat, under the ear, and pushed savagely.

"Good fer you, mister," a militiaman cried in his ear. "Them devils is as bad as the British."

"We got 'em licked," Chid said. "There's no call for—for this."

Lanterns began to glow. Somebody threw together a brush fire on the beach. The four English boats were pulling rapidly away for the ship. Perry and his seamen were launching a small work raft, bent upon harrying them. Chid guessed that there were twenty prisoners rounded up by the fire. He couldn't say how many English dead there were; it was hard telling which were English.

He was turning in the cutlass, at the fire, when he heard his name called.

"Chidsy Alwyn."

At first he did not know where the voice came from. It was repeated, and Chid swung. A marine prisoner, standing with the others inside the cordon of guards, had detached himself slightly.

"Mr. Alwyn," the man whispered, "remember me?"

"Nope."

"I was on the *Blessed Cause*, corporal to George Lefferts. I seen you, many's the time. Richard Phelps's my name."

"Look. You better stay under guard with the prisoners."

"It ain't much of a guard we need in enemy country."

"You're not in anything but what you chose, mister. You're an American."

"Well, yes an' no. We was a curious lot, George's men was, from all over. I'm a Cape Codder myself, an' I got in some trouble an' George took me in. He took good care o' us until he talked us into going over to the English after we got away from the *Blessed Cause*. But he had a kind o' a holt over most o' us, especially me, an' we went. I see I was wrong now."

"How'd you get away from the privateer?"

"In the gig. She was ready for days before—before we had to use her. George never meant for it to get to a fight. But you upset him on that, Mr. Alwyn. We run sou', near to Edenton, an' then landed on the Carolina beach at night. We struck west an' came up here along the Mississippi to Fort Detroit."

"What did you do with all the money you stole?"

"We got some on it. But George, he hid the coin, buried it, I reckon. I don't know where, save some place near where we landed. Mr. Alwyn, I got consid'ble money on me right now. I'd pay uncommon handsome was you to—well, say, help me get away."

"You must think I'm crazy."

"No, just sensible. I'd go all I got, nigh two hunderd dollars."

"No. Get back in line or I'll call the corporal, mister."

"Well, no harm tryin', Mister Alwyn. Maybe when you think about it it'll appeal more. I guess I won't be hard to find."

Phelps laughed lightly and sauntered to his fellow prisoners.

The ship in the bay was making sail now. Chid could hear the piping of her sailing master and the creak of the boat booms as the landing barges were decked.

It was curious, this disorganization after the fight. Men wandered about aimlessly, without direction, showing a morbid interest in the wounded and the dead. The Corn-Eater's people were gathered by themselves, dividing the loot from their victims. After a while the prisoners squatted down, and soon the guard followed suit. Only the surgeon's mates passed busily among them, always with that white pale stretcher, sometimes light, sometimes heavy. Prisoners and guards were swapping stories. A man soberly sang a hymn. Others joined him.

"I reckon we better get some sleep," Nez observed to Chid long after the British vessel had passed into the open lake.

"A-yep."

They went back to the office shack. The roof was completely gone. The candle sputtered in the lazy breeze from the lake, insects soared madly down and into the flame and lay curled and crisp on the plank table. But late as it was and poor as the candle was, Chid read Mary's letter before he finally lay on his narrow bed and stared briefly into the strange starlighted patch of heaven where the roof had been.

In the days succeeding the British attack, Chid forgot all about his apprehension. Overnight the temper of Erie changed; its indifference to the war, its cynical attitude toward the efforts of the shipbuilders and the seamen, was replaced by feverish co-operation. The Civilian Marine Brigade took in thirty-two new recruits the morning after the attack. The Civil Guard was able to detach all the shipwrights from sentry duty after the quick influx of trappers, farmers, shopkeepers, and townsmen.

It suddenly freed Noah Brown's men, permitting them to spend all their time at the two yards. Chid reckoned it was as good as getting twenty or more of those skilled workmen which Commodore Chauncey still detained at Sackett's Harbor.

At dawn the next morning all hands turned to to repair the damage, which was considerable, especially at the Cascade yard. Buildings had to be restored and made weather-tight. Stores had to be checked and those hurt by fire or direct hits sent to the riggers or the forge or the joiner shop for repair and salvage.

By slowly and painstakingly wedging between the floor of the gully and the bilges, the capsized *Scorpion* was righted. A week flew by before she again set on even keel and the stove-in topsides were exposed for repairs. Mr. Knell, the forgemaster, borrowed two carpenters from Chid and put his vital iron shop back into production in three desperate days of labor.

Chid's gang, pushed by him as it had never been pushed before, laid the bow of the *Ariel* bare by removing most of the planking between the covering boards and the waterline on both sides. With the frame thus exposed, Chid ordered temporary braces secured to prevent the hull from curling open like a blossoming flower and ripped the shattered stem out with saw and ax. Fortunately, by studying his problem long into each

night, he could make the repairs without docking or beaching the schooner. It was necessary to move all stores aft so that the bow would rise above the water, and to shift this weight as the repairs progressed. Old shipbuilders came to admire the ingenious solution and to compliment Chid on the success of his operation.

"I reckon even Henry Eckford would have sent her into the graving dock," a New York shipwright told Chid one noontime. "Seems 's if they teach you 'prentices pretty good down to Connecticut. But, lad, she'll never be fit to ram ice."

"She'll never have to ram ice; just a Britisher or two. I reckon she'd do it all by herself if I turned her loose on the lake."

The *Ariel's* third sister, the one-gun schooner *Porcupine*, was launched on the fourth day after the battle. Work on the brigs had almost ceased, for Perry gave orders immediately to complete the most advanced vessels so that they could be counted upon for the protection of the harbor. The British might be back in force any day. All hands labored on the three gunboats. George Carmody remained critically ill. Noah Brown, not hurt badly by the flying splinter which had downed him early in the fight, was nevertheless confined to his chamber in the Buehler house upon the orders of Dr. Parsons.

Antoine again logged the forests to replace the timber stocks which had been destroyed. He was accompanied by some of Forster's state militiamen, under orders to saw, chop, or fight, as circumstances dictated. A rear attack by a force landed on either or both sides of the bay was not thought impossible by the Navy men. Nez came in, after a long day's search, with two yoke of oxen to haul the logs into the base. The original teams, their work finished, had been slaughtered for beef.

The activity in the yard exceeded even the previous tremendous efforts. The men worked now with an angry doggedness, as if every adze stroke and hammer blow was an actual blow at a real physical enemy. The days were longer now, and the nights warm. A cask of whale oil had been wheedled out of Sackett's Harbor, and Mr. Knell converted whatever could be found in the way of bottles, buckets, and pots into open-flame lanterns. They smoked and stunk horribly, but if he could stay awake, a man could work the whole night through by the light of one of them.

"Leastwise," Paph North pointed out, "them lamps keep the plagued

mersquitters away. Tarnation, I may some day ferget the ache o' my body, but I'll never ferget them pests."

The timid of Erie had fled to the south, to Waterford, then fanned out into the eastern villages. Many likeside farms were deserted, their crops still growing. It was from these that Nez obtained much of the great store of food that was required. Nez would locate the supply; the next day the wagons of the foragers would come, and by nightfall few living things, vegetable or animal, would remain in the locality.

The town records were removed from the village for safety. Judge Nash Belmont, due to hold Circuit Court at Erie in May, struck the town off his calendar. He said he'd be damned if he'd try to concentrate upon dispensing justice when a Crown broadside was almost certain to interrupt him. Stone's Erie Hotel still kept open house—though Mr. Stone, restoring the place after the visit of the Corn-Eater's tribe, vowed that Congress would pay the bill—and Denny's Saddlery Shop, the Pennsylvania Emporium, Slack's General Supply and Provision Storehouse, and a few lesser merchants remained open. The proposed stagecoach line from Black Rock to Sandusky, which would make Erie a meal stop, was held in abeyance. Improvement work on the road it was to travel was abandoned. Erie was a town waiting, the faint-hearted already gone, the remainder ready and packed to leave upon the first alarm. But it looked with faith, at last, to Captain Perry and Noah Brown. Their still-unbuilt fleet alone could save it.

Chid did not get to the village very often. His trips there were seldom further than the Buehler House on French Street, on the shipyard side of the main market section. On one of these visits he had a long intimate talk with Noah Brown.

The shipbuilder was still in his bed, surrounded by plans and half-models and his drawing instruments. From a corner post of the bed there hung handy a brass-bound telescope, and he spent hours with it fixed to his eye. He could see, through the open bay window, the shipyards, the naval storehouse, the lake, and the hasty new defenses which gashed the earth in fresh scars all around Presque Isle bay.

Chid had many things to talk over, but first he tackled that next job after the *Ariel*. Noah Brown listened soberly, almost gratefully.

"Carmody's out," Chid said, carefully, sitting on the edge of the

brocaded Frenchy chair near the bed. "You're not—well, quite fit yourself, sir. Orlando Hog was a good willing man, not a shipbuilder but a first-rate handler of men. It was terrible he had to die. Paph North's all crippled up with ague. Honest Huntley's good, but mostly brawn, and so—"

"It leaves Chidsy Alwyn," Mr. Brown smiled.

"A-yep," Chid grinned. "I'd be proud to help out."

"I'd be proud to have you, Chidsy. You see what we are up against—lack of men, material, adequate defense, I need not recite the dismal list. Have you ever built a full ship?"

"No, sir, not completely. Only the *Ariel*," Chid said. "But I've worked on plenty. I reckon it's not much different than building a schooner, some bigger, that's all. It struck me that a man could build two almost as easy as one—just make everything twice, that's all. Time would be saved all along the line—one set of measurements, one set of templates and patterns—why, Mr. Brown, I reckon if I said 'make two' instead of 'make one,' we'd have the second brig kind of like a by-product."

Mr. Brown smiled and shook his head.

"It's a dangerous proposition, Chidsy," he said. "Industry has toyed with the idea; it's called quantity production. The pottery trade, some of the forges—even the furniture trade—have all tried it. But it's a vicious practice, Chidsy. It stifles good craftsmanship, it places a premium on speed and quantity that cheapens the product; worst of all, by saving labor, it insidiously destroys labor itself. When one man can do the work of two, when, further, he uses some of these hellish labor-saving machines that are coming into such common use—why, in a generation, he has nothing to do; a monster of his own creation has devoured himself and his trade. I'm almost certain of one thing, Chidsy, that ships cannot be built that way."

Chid considered Mr. Brown's remarks gravely. What he had said was true; he had often heard the noon-hour shop talk at the Tatum yard forward the same idea. But that was in peacetime, when the nation only desired ships, did not *demand* them.

"I reckon that it ain't fair to think like that at times like these, Mr. Brown," Chid said cautiously. "There ain't anything more important than speed right now. Quality don't matter much, not when this fleet has

only to fight once. Oh, I know that you stand for the finest in ship-building in America, that a hundred little back-creek yards will follow the latest methods of Noah Brown. But it still don't matter. Destroy a trade—it's better than having the British destroy a whole country, isn't it, sir? I know I could save weeks of time if you'd let me build *both* brigs."

"I'm still a young man," Noah Brown murmured, looking out across the bay, "yet right from under my feet a new generation of thought rises. Perhaps I'm just blind, perhaps reason must always be a decade behind inspiration. Chidsy, I'm not in favor of your method. I feel that I'm betraying an honorable craft. But I cannot quarrel with your assertion that speed is of the utmost importance. You have my permission to try this—this double building. You are in charge of both brigs from this day on, Chidsy."

"No questions asked?"

"No questions asked," Mr. Brown nodded, unsmiling. "I shall design and indicate construction details as always; you shall build."

Chid stood up, feeling the strong resolution within him like a heady potent wine. He had arrived at the top, had become a foreman, not of one but of two of the most vital ships on the earth. There was only one more step—ownership of his own yard. Chid savagely brushed the thought of that away. He was eager to try out his ideas, to organize the two now-separate building gangs into one, to try this new method which had been named dangerous.

"At Waterford," said Chid, feeling the strange new power creep unwillingly into his tone, "I bought four arks, Mr. Brown. With them we can maintain our own supply line from Pittsburgh. Cap'n Wooley's guns are ditched on Bad Woman's Island; we can pick them up easy. I'll need two hundred dollars. And thirty-three dollars that I had to give to the Corn-Eater to fight. I reckon I ought to make a bill out, all regular."

"Do," said Mr. Brown. "But I want to tell you something, Chidsy. Congress and the Navy Department are fighting like stubborn fools about appropriations for the whole Erie fleet. Outside of three thousand dollars that Mr. Madison gave to Dan Dobbins, there hasn't been a copper sent for all we've done here. Dan's money went long ago, before we got here, in fact."

"But we've been paid right along."

"Aye, with my personal funds, Chidsy. I'm not a rich man; I can't continue much longer. I've borrowed and wheedled, and I'm at the end of my hawser. I don't know when Congress will pay our bills or give us funds. Captain Perry's men haven't been paid in two months. The Black Rock Navy men have already quit because they haven't been paid since they arrived."

"I'll bet Sackett's Harbor gets its money."

"It does. Chauncey seemingly has the proper political connection; possibly his seniority on the Navy lists gets him attention. I don't know. But we must carry on, Chidsy. Sometime this nation will realize that we are at war and provide the sinews."

"A-yep," Chid nodded. "We must carry on. But sometimes it makes a man think that John Shallus and Preserved Fish and Chauncey and Mr. Stone are the smart ones. They all make something out of the war, rank, profits—all that comes first."

"Don't despair, Chidsy," Mr. Brown advised quietly. "I have this morning sent yet another letter demanding funds. Make the best of it. It will soon be all straightened out, I'm sure."

"What about those arks, Mr. Brown?"

"We need them, I grant. But, Chidsy, you're a foreman now. I'd say that they were your worry."

"A-yep," said Chid and took his hat up. "They're my worry, sir."

Chid went to the Cascade yard. Antoine was just coming in with a team dragging a huge root stump on a flat stoneboat. The brig skeletons remained as they had been left when the British had appeared. All hands were still at work on the schooners.

He moved his few belongings and his drafting instruments over to the porched board shack which had been George Carmody's office. He returned for a thick book of drawings and for a small bundle of cured furs which belonged to Nez. Nez called the furs his "gravey." They were from the game he had shot for the kitchens, and he planned to sell them when a trader happened through. Dan Dobbins said a wolverine skin was worth up to two dollars—and two dollars would buy eight gallons of the best Monongahela. Chid laughed without humor—Fish, Shallus, even Nez, they were all out for number one.

He had his organization completed before noon. After dinner, the men

were divided into three gangs. "Three?" Paph North questioned. "Your new job gone to your head, youngster?"

"Nope," Chid said shortly, "I meant three. One takes over brig number one, one brig number two, and the third gang just keeps the sized finished stock coming to you as you want it."

"By God, Chid. Damned if I'm goin' to build up 'thout I pick an' shape my own stock. No shipbuilder ever worked that way."

"You're going to, Paph—either that or you can go home."

"Hunh! Home? I'd love to, but I got the queer notion I won't have no home if this fleet don't get itself built damn' soon. George, Chid, I'm rugged glad I learned my trade when a man could learn it complete. 'Nother ten years, an' a man'll be nuthin' but—but a specialist!"

"Well, I learned the trade complete, Paph. That's why I can short cut now. I reckon you can be sub-foreman on number one."

"What do you do?" Paph inquired truculently.

"Well," Chid said, "for one thing, get your supplies. There ain't anything's important as that right now. Paph, get your gang moving. I've got to go down to Waterford right away."

Chapter Fifteen

CHRIS KEMP WAS ALL for making a party of it for the night. Tomorrow would be time enough to go into the woods. But his visitor from Presque Isle would not hear of it.

"I still got some bat blood on hand, Mr. Alwyn," he suggested.

"No, thanks, Mr. Kemp," Chid grinned. "Say, that stuff sure laid my friend Nez out. Down to the coast they used to consider Nott's stomach and a cannon about the same things. Nez claims that some of the boys once poured a quart of dunder into him and another into a thirty-two long for a test, and it rotted the gun through in twenty-two minutes but Nez called for another quart for a chaser. But it wasn't as potent as that liquor of yours."

Kemp laughed and poured two drinks into horn cups.

"But, seriously, Mr. Kemp, I've got to get back to the yard. I want to catch a forager's cart that's due through here about dark. Can you get your boys together?"

"Surely. We can tramp down toward Meadville a few miles and find all the trees we need for practice."

Four burly loggers followed Kemp and Chid along the trace trail through the deep virgin forest. They carried double-bitted axes and shovels over their shoulders and keen slash trimmers in their belts, each a huge bearded man that walked with a bearlike roll and chewed strong twist tobacco with a contented bovine expression.

"White oak," Chid explained as they marched, indicating near-by trees as he made his points, "ain't just white oak. To a shipbuilder it's frames and rub molds and rail caps and battle plank and almost anything but decking, spars and crooks. You've got to understand the construction of a ship to cut stock right. I've brought you some drawings of the schooners

we built and a list of the most usable cuts. Study them up, Mr. Kemp, and make out you're a shipwright when you log. See it through his eyes all the time. He wants clear, straight-grown trees, always long lengths—and watch out for pin-doze and sap pockets and any red-oak smell. You can always tell red oak; it smells like a barnful of tomcats. You won't have much trouble with oak."

"No, not much has been rejected. But them knees and crooks and breast hooks; they're sons o' bitches to cut right."

They stopped at an ancient gnarled oak. Chid indicated the ground which was to be cleared and the feeder roots to be cut. The loggers had the great tree down in thirty minutes, its roots an earthy bundle higher than a man's head.

"Cripes," Kemp muttered, "we been takin' them knees an' such from the heavy crotches, nigh the big lower branches. You take 'em from the roots, eh?"

"Root stock lasts longer down under the waterline where this stuff is mostly used. And it'll bring you double the price of top crotches," Chid explained. "Now watch this scratch I'm making. So—that snag'll give you as good a quarter knee as there's in the *Constitution*, and she's as near iron as a wooden ship can be. Cut it rough first. Let it dry in the open, say for a couple of weeks; then trim down to the biggest uniform dimension she'll make with your adzes."

"Well, good, Mr. Alwyn. Now, take spar pine. How'd you go about searchin' out for a yard? What in hell's a yard anyway?"

Chris Kemp was an intelligent man and learned quickly. They were back in the sawmill camp long before dark. Chid ate the bountiful supper with relish. There was a crisp roast of hog ribs and boiled new potatoes and a buttered red cabbage which had been steeped in cider vinegar. The bread was tough, heavy, and filling. The loggers called it "mellowed Shallus hide" and winked and ate vast slabs of it plastered with a limpid mixture of goose grease and wild honey.

"John Shallus," Kemp observed, "don't believe a man can work without proper grub. Bless him, says I."

Chid reckoned it the best meal he'd ever had outside of Aunt Leety's house. It made him almost angry, thinking about the miserable government food at Presque Isle.

They sauntered to the road on which the forager was due, picking their teeth. Kemp belched comfortably, his thumbs hooked into his snake belt.

"Five hundred dollars is a nice sum for an afternoon's work," he said to Chid. "John'll send it soon's he gets my report that you learned us. We're much obliged to you, Mr. Alwyn."

"I only want three hundred," Chid said. "He's to take two hundred out for the four arks."

"What in tarnation you want them for?"

"I don't want them. The government does. I'm just laying out the money, and I don't know when I'll get it back. But we've got to have a way to get our supplies up. We finally got most of them rounded up at Pittsburgh; now we've got to get them carried to here. I reckon there's nothing like doing things yourself if you want it done good."

"That's a good rule. Well, Mr. Alwyn, anyway you're still three hundred dollars ahead. I hope you have some luck gettin' boatmen."

"I haven't thought much about them yet."

The forager's cart rattled along the hard baked mud of the pike. A militiaman drove the heavy team which hauled the ridiculously light wagon.

"I went to where Mr. Nott said," the driver yawned, "but somebody must've got there fust. With cash, I reckon. I didn't get a slab o' the copper an' on'y one lousy keg o' powder an' no leather 'tall. Hell's a'mighty, Mr. Alwyn, people 'round this territory won't touch Noah Brown's notes o' promise for what they sell, an' they get sore when Mr. Nott swipes the stuff. How're we to get that fleet finished anyway?"

"Good night, Mr. Kemp," Chid said and sprang to the wagon seat.

"Good night, Mr. Alwyn. An' we're mighty obliged. John'll double his profits with what you learned us, I swear."

Chid tried to sleep. But the wagon lurched uncomfortably, and the militiaman babbled unceasingly about a girl that he expected to sleep with once he got a sloggin of rum into her, and Chid spent the long ride into Erie in planning out the next week's work on the brigs.

He worried for a long time about a crew of polers and boatmen, but two weeks later, a few days after the Ohio steamboat had delivered the

barges at the lowest white water of the Allegany, his problem was settled unexpectedly for him. One mild evening Azial Baxter came to see him.

Chid was laying out the eight-squaring in preparation for tapering a bowsprit at the time. Mr. Baxter, as he had guessed, was a giant, a hulking, hairy man with huge feet and a lithe catlike tread. But his voice, in strange contrast, though deep, was mild and gentle, almost timid, and he approached Chid with a shyness that was comical.

"I'm aimin' to see Mr. Alwyn," Mr. Baxter said, doffing his hat like a servant.

"I'm him," Chid said. "Don't you remember me?"

They shook hands.

"'Twas dark that night," Azial Baxter said, "an' I may have been a bit excited."

"It's all right," Chid said and sat on the spar, his feet tucked under him as if he were perched on a split-rail fence.

Mr. Baxter cleared his throat and made a careful small speech that he had obviously rehearsed. It was his thanks, and his wife's thanks, for the favor Chid had done in, as Mr. Baxter said, rescuing her from the terrible savages. It embarrassed Chid. What he had done was nothing. But he could understand Mr. Baxter's thanks, and, in a strange way, value them.

"Those Indians helped us plenty," Chid said, trying to place the man at ease. "I guess I really owe you."

"I heard about the fight you fellers had. Matter o' fact Mr. Alwyn, I saw the ships sail in. A mighty sight; a mighty sight. It sets a man to thinkin', havin' a actu'l live enemy right under his eyes. I was in Erie that day looking for some capital. I or my wife, you might say, thinks it's time I quit flatboatin' and got on my own. We tried farmin' once, but I expect I just ain't one to raise things."

"Did you get your capital?"

"Not a smell o' it. Erie money's all scared downriver, seems. I'm goin' to hire back into flatboatin' ag'in; me an' Barnabus is, an' I got to admit I'm satisfied. It's the missus who ain't."

"I could do something for you, Mr. Baxter," Chid said, thinking fast. "That is, if you want to stay on the river."

"God, how I do! I don't know nuthin' else. Mrs. Baxter, she wanted me

to set up a sawmill an' take on boarding an' general order-cuttin' for folks. But it would have took up'ards o' five hundred dollars capital. All we got is the site; purty's a picture mill, she is, an' fast water ten months a year, right on our land—but, hell's fire, Mr. Alwyn, I just don't know the trade. An' what's more, between us, mind—I don't want to know it."

"How would you like to haul for the government?"

"Haul what?"

"Anything they've a mind to send up—guns, shot, anything."

"Up, you say? Up costs like sin, Mr. Alwyn."

"Up, Mr. Baxter, from Pittsburgh to Waterford, an' team from there to Presque Isle. The gov'mint'll pay good."

"I got two teams. The wagons ain't so good. But not my own boats."

"I've got four boats. We could make out. I'll put in the arks, and you put in the teams."

Chid explained. The details came to him as he talked. It was as if he had planned this thing for years; that the workings had been carefully studied and proved.

"I can get the arks any time, down to the steamboat head. The first load up will be guns and shot from Bad Woman's Island. You ought to get double pay a mile for that haul. Then go down empty and fast. You'll be loaded with naval stores up, and I don't know but that I can get some lumber for you on the down trips soon."

"I'll have to hire me some polers. And teamsters, too. It'll take cash."

"I've got three hundred dollars to get started with," Chid said.

"Good. It's sufficient an' then some. Mr. Alwyn, it ain't any o' my business, but it sounds like you was puttin' in your own boats an' money."

"A-yep. Technically they're mine. But the government'll pay me back so soon's Noah Brown requests."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Damned effen I wouldn't druther be partners with you than the gov'ment. I kind o' cotton to you, Mr. Alwyn, you're young an' lively an'—well—likely ambitious. Mrs. she sez to me, she sez, 'Azial, that Mr. Alwyn, now, there's a lad to watch. You was like him when you married me. But you never come to nuthin' much. You didn't have that fire in your eye like Mr. Alwyn; you lacked suthin', Azial—but I see it in him.' She's a sagacious woman, Mrs. is."

"I'm sure she is, Mr. Baxter."

"Make it Azial. My folks was fancy, Mr. Alwyn."

"So were mine. Name's Chidsy; just Chid, to friends."

They parted, Azial Baxter promising to pass on developments from time to time through his wife. "She," he said without shame, "is the brains for me, Chid. You don't mind?"

"Nope. Mrs. Baxter seemed able enough."

"She is, Chid. Goddammit, she is! Just give her an' Barnabus a decent opportunity, an' I'll be suthin' yet."

It was a smooth-working arrangement from the first. Azial Baxter left the next morning for the south, and seven days later he and the polers which he had hired at extra good wages had the jettisoned stores from Bad Woman's Island on the repaired wagons headed for Presque Isle. For the first time since the fleet had been started there were sufficient supplies, and the building proceeded as Chid planned.

He had a pit dug near Carmody's shanty and had Culver Coons board it over with slabs. A small trap door led to the treasure room, which contained the precious kegged spikes and drift rod and oakum and paint that Azial's second trip south yielded. If the British came again, their fire could not destroy the stores this time. He rigged a small ship's bell to the trap door. Nobody could enter the sunken storeroom without ringing the bell.

Chid was excitedly happy about the progress of the brigs. Daily they grew under his direction. He took a huge satisfaction from a visible gain, as when, after days of careful preparation of the frame—the tedious dubbing of the bevels, the housing in of the butt blocks, the cutting of the limbers—the application of the planking was at last commenced, and a whole side of a brig became complete between a sunrise and a sunset. As dusk fell after a day like that, Chid would half-close his eyes as he turned away from the vessels and see them full-rigged and proud, with living men on their decks, standing out of the bay for that terrific trial which was to come.

News of the British fleet trickled into the base from time to time. Dan Dobbins often made mysterious voyages into the lake in the dead of night to meet the spies and agents. Indian runners, gaunt and hungry, sometimes staggered into Erie with dispatches. Several of the prisoners taken in the raid were coaxed to talk. Of one thing there was no doubt: the

British intended to fight for the lake and fight hard. As near as could be learned, their fleet would consist of six vessels. The most formidable was the *Detroit*, still not completed because of the acute shortage of skilled shipwrights. She was a full ship, as was her sister, the *Queen Charlotte*, measuring four hundred and ninety tons, and was the flagship of Captain Barclay, an English officer of reputation as a fighting skipper. Barclay had been seasoned in the service of Nelson, a British gentleman officer who was prouder of his wounds than his medals and rank.

The battle fleet, as Perry pieced together the information from Canada, would aggregate about fifteen hundred tons and would include two full ships, one brig, and three schooners capable of throwing a combined broadside weighing four hundred and fifty-nine pounds. Against this formidable line Perry could throw only five vessels, with a total tonnage of about twelve hundred tons.

Numerically, the advantage of the British was not so great. But the American fleet contained no full ships—only the two brigs building and the three schooners already launched. The total broadside weight almost matched the enemy, but it was in the form of light metal carronades. Perry could fire only ten long guns and was hopelessly outweighed by the English broadside of heavy guns.

As the burden of making the American fleet useful gradually passed from the shipbuilders to the Navy, it was apparent, however, that the great lack was sufficient and adequately trained seamen and gunners. By almost superhuman efforts, which included recruiting of even Kentucky mountaineers, Captain Perry had gathered together about three hundred men to man the fleet. They were a motley crowd, insubordinate, surly, and without trained leadership. With the coming of the warm weather about one-third of their number were stricken with the lake fever in varying degrees of intensity, and always thereafter one out of every three was in some stage of the disease at Stone's tavern or in the adjoining brick house which the owner, one Enoch Blattenberg, had turned over to the government. As summer descended upon Presque Isle the crying need was no longer for material but for men, men for the forges, for the rigger's gang, for the joiner crews, the gunsmith's shop, and the sailmaker's loft, fighting men for the fleet.

Captain Perry realized long before the brigs began to sprout lower

masts and be pierced for guns that, because of his light cannon, any battle against the heavy long-range guns of the enemy would have to be a close action for him. Only so, within musket shot, could he hope to make effectual fire against the great ships of the English.

Toward the end of the month, Perry departed for Lake Ontario to lead the seamen who were to take part in the attack upon Fort George on the Canadian side. Great hopes were entertained for this expedition. If successful, it meant that the four American naval vessels bottled up in the Niagara could join the fleet at Presque Isle. Original plans had been to disregard these vessels in planning the lake fleet, and to build entirely new what ships were needed. But as the weeks flew on, with supplies never reaching the demand for them, and the builders decimated by the lake fever, and the well men tired and overworked, it became evident that the five vessels building would be the limit of the Presque Isle yard's production.

Chid stood at the mole and watched the captain and Jesse Elliot embark upon the *Salina*. It was a cool evening, after one of Erie's hot sultry days, the western sky a blaze of sunset fire and the east already a deep purple. Fish hawks screamed over the surfacing bait schools in the bay, an owl hooted solemnly in the beech stands beyond the naval storehouse, and the bite of the distant pit saw in the Cascade yard marked the passage of time in steady measured rhythm.

Perry paused at the gang plank of the *Salina*. He shook hands with Mr. Brown, who had been driven to the mole by LeGrand. The mayor of Erie, a large hound-faced man, pushed forward to wish him luck and to press his hand.

"Bring back them ships, cap'n. I never reckoned nobody'd consider this lake worth fightin' over. But if you keep this region United States, I'll promise to make Erie the best town in it."

Perry laughed softly and stepped suddenly toward Chid.

"Your fate, sir," he said to the mayor and placed his hand on Chid's shoulder, "still rests with Mr. Alwyn and his men. Without them it would be foolish to talk of fighting; stupidity to even hope for a victory."

Perry shook hands with Chid.

"Good luck, sir," Chid mumbled, suddenly embarrassed.

It made Chid proud, being included with these important men by

Captain Perry. Somehow, as he watched the *Salina* join gently with the darkness out on the lake, he could feel a vast peace, as if, as the fat mayor had hinted, the war was over and Erie was marching forward to greatness. In that time to come he, Chidsy Alwyn, would still be an important man, a man to be included when other important men shook hands.

He rode up the hill to French Street with Noah Brown. The ship-builder was quiet and uncommunicative, busy, Chid supposed, with his own endless problems. But Chid had to know about one thing. He broke the silence as the carriage reached the lakeside cart path.

"Mr. Brown, I've been wondering about that money owing me by the gov'mint. It's been a long time. Did you send for it?"

"Twice," Noah Brown answered. "But we've got to be patient about such things, Chidsy. Likely, the Navy Department will have to have the bills—yours and mine both—approved by Congress. A democracy is a cumbersome thing in times of war or emergency. We, the generals and admirals and shipbuilders, must become virtual emperors—supreme in dictatorial command—in order to achieve our purposes; but Congress, democracy, the voice of the people, Chidsy, always controls us. Were we to wait upon the people's approval or to depend upon their direct instructions—why, we'd never get things done. So we have to risk our reputations, our personal ranks and station and credit, even our capital if necessary, to serve our country as it expects to be served."

"I can see that," Chid said, "but our claims are fair. We loaned the gov'ment money; it's fair that it's returned."

"Of course it's fair," Mr. Brown nodded. "And, though it may take time, I'm sure that Congress will approve our requisitions."

"I s'ppose. But when? Just a simple little matter like paying an honest debt seems to get all involved in politics and official seals. I been figuring on using that money I laid out for the arks and the Corn-Eater."

"Soon?"

"Yes, sir. August ain't so far away, and when my papers run out I got some plans."

"Well, don't worry, Chidsy. I'll write again tonight. I assure you that I'm anxious to have my sums returned also."

Chid said good night. He walked along the path in the falling dusk,

guided by the winking of Mr. Knell's forge hearth. But he did not to-night return to the Cascade yard.

He walked rapidly to the clay cliff to the west. He knew the ground there almost by heart, could visualize it just as it would appear when it would be the Alwyn Shipyard. That time was not so far off. He had no idea of what price might be asked for the site by the Pennsylvania Population Company. But it could not possibly be great, not when land in the near-by Donation District was free, not when a man with one hundred dollars cash or its equivalent in stock, tools, and seeds could have a forty-acre farm as a gift.

Azial Baxter had sent word that he'd pay the three hundred dollars Chid had advanced as soon as he collected from the government, possibly sooner if John Shallus continued to keep him loaded on the down hauls. That and the ark money and the back wages would give him almost six hundred dollars. Old Man Tatum used to boast about starting his yard, in 1763, with a fifth of that and "guts." Chid reckoned he had the guts. But now he needed the money.

He stopped suddenly, his toe against a new white birch stake which had been driven into the soft clay soil. Chid examined it with a sinking sensation. It was maul-flattened on top. Beyond it were other similar stakes, forming a shape which enclosed a large tract. He knew them for surveyor's stakes.

Returning in the darkness, he felt again that almost stilled apprehension, the urge to hurry, hurry...

Sylvester Tatro met him opposite the Cascade yard.

"I've been lookin' for you, Chid. All over, I have," the boy panted.

"You better call me Mr. Alwyn," Chid said. "Anyways, in the yard in front of the others."

"All right, Chid. Look, Honest Huntley's raisin' Ned about the bulwark sheathin'; sez you're to approve it before he puts in such sappy stuff. An' Nez Nott come in from the country, an' he claims they ain't a fathom o' marling in all the county. We got to let the riggers use rawhide instead. But you got to say."

"Is that all?"

"No. The stavin' o' number two's magazine's so green it's shrunk

enough to pitch a cat through the joints. Lieutenant—the feller's to command the *Ariel*, Chid . . .”

“Packett, Lieutenant Packett.”

“That’s the one. Well, he says no matter what, we got to close up that magazine, or the first spark from a honin’ stun or the cook’s fire’ll blow the ship to hell an’ gone.”

“I’ll be right down,” Chid said. “Golly, I wasn’t gone over an hour or so.”

“That’s right. But, Jes’, Chid, don’t it make you feel good to be so important?”

“A-yep,” Chid said and slid down the bank to the ways level, “I reckon it does.”

He was busy until midnight and up with the dawn. He could not leave the brigs for even a few moments. Everything depended upon their completion in the quickest possible time. Nothing could interfere with that, not even worrying about those mysterious stakes on the shipyard site. It would be so for a month at least. After that, he could take time to breathe, to dream again. And after that would come August, August and freedom...

Chapter Sixteen

"MR. ADAM TRUNCHARD, ESQ.," the letter from the Pennsylvania Population Company had informed Chid in reply to his inquiry about the shipyard land, "is our accredited sales agent for the Erie region. He will be pleased to have you call upon him at his home, corner Guardhouse Street and Hemlock Swamp Lane...."

It was almost dark when Chid reached Mr. Trunchard's white clapboarded cottage. He knocked on the six-paneled door, and a small, jovial middle-aged man opened it to him.

"Mr. Trunchard?" Chid asked.

"Well, that depends," the man answered, looking at Chid roguishly from over square, silver-bound eye glasses. "Now, was you the sheriff, I'd deny it. But was you, say, owing me money, I'd admit to it."

"I might be owing you, Mr. Trunchard," Chid grinned.

"Well, then, come in, Mr. Alwyn," the agent said heartily and bowed Chid into the summer parlor.

"You know me?"

"I think so. My company informed me that a Mr. Alwyn had written about a certain lakeside tract. So, naturally, I expected you. Enter and light, sir."

Mr. Trunchard brushed several dozing cats off the caned chairs and indicated one for Chid. A double whale-oil lamp burned cheerily on an octagon walnut pedestal table in front of a pockmarked mirror, throwing a ruddy, cozy light over the low-ceilinged, papered room. Trunchard, Chid thought, seemed to live comfortably, even prosperously.

"Now, that land you wrote about, Mr. Alwyn," Chid's host said, "is spoken for. I took an option on it from a party I'm not free to name; a three-months' option to be exercised if and when Cap'n Perry chases the

British back to Canada for good. It's the smart way to buy land in unsettled times. What did you want with that land, way off from town, not much timber on it, and no good for farming?"

"I'd rather not say, Mr. Trunchard."

"Well, you don't have to. I wouldn't, did I have plans for it. But I can guess. A farsighted man can see this town grown even to there, and it would make a handsome home section. Once some of us bought a cow farm outside of Black Rock—Buffalo, you know—and folks thought we were addled. It's got eighteen houses and a church on it now, Mr. Alwyn—too bad you missed on that tract. If this other party fails to take the option, I'll notify you."

"How much is it worth?"

Mr. Trunchard lighted a stogie over the lamp before answering.

"All of ten thousand dollars, Mr. Alwyn. But my company's placed a thieving price on it. Only one thousand dollars; cash money."

"I was afraid of that. I haven't that much money, Mr. Trunchard."

"Credit might be acceptable, Mr. Alwyn. But my company's liable to up the price slight for credit. But, look, I take it you want to make a quick dollar?"

"A-yep."

"A foolish question, I see—you answered so prompt. Well, I've got an A-1 timber tract adjoining the Donation District, right nigh a good creek. It's mostly oak, some birch and pine and scatterings of larch, elm, and beech. Right now timber land is a top investment."

"I don't have the time to run a mill," Chid said.

"You don't have to. A feller from Waterford's after the tract. Was you to buy it ahead of him and heft the price—just moderate, you understand—why, he'd pay the difference, I swear. A Waterford citizen is always fair game for an Erie man, I might say—so don't get concerned about ethics."

"Ethics shouldn't bother when you're after a profit, seems 's if. How much are you holding it at?"

"Another thieving bargain, Mr. Alwyn. You can have the tract, with riparian rights to the creek, for fifty cents the acre. There are five hundred and thirty acres, more or less—call it two hundred and fifty dollars even."

"You're sure this party is after it hard?"

"Terrible hard. He'd go four hundred easy. Make the deal, and I'll name him to you and guarantee the facts."

"To tell the truth, Mr. Trunchard, I haven't any cash. But I take it you're a man to listen to a proposition."

"Surely. Selling land in wartimes doesn't keep my cats in liver. I'm glad to turn an extra dollar where I can."

"All right," said Chid, thinking fast, "I've three hundred dollars owing to me by a feller south. It's good as soon as he gets paid for some freight hauling. Inside a month for certain. I'll give you my claim for the tract. You'll make fifty dollars."

Mr. Trunchard was a cautious man. Azial Baxter was not known to him personally, but he studied Azial's promissory note to Chid with attention, figuring carefully under the lamplight with pencil and paper. After a long time, while Chid played with a manx-tailed cat and hoped, Mr. Trunchard stood up and offered his hand.

"Fifty dollars is handsome interest," he said. "I'll want to check before passing title, Mr. Alwyn."

"A-yep. See Noah Brown or Cap'n Perry's clerk at the navy yard. I'll look you up in a few days."

They shook hands and said good night. Chid reckoned he'd ask a hundred and fifty dollars profit on the land. He'd come out a hundred dollars ahead and, what was more important, have that much of his money in hand against the time when the shipyard tract option would be taken up or let lapse. He was terribly disappointed. That land had grown on him these last months; he secretly considered it almost his own. The price was high, above a dollar an acre. But he supposed that a land development company, like Mr. Trunchard's in Buffalo, was seeking it, depending upon Erie to grow and absorb it after the war.

He comforted himself a little by promising to buy the lake front no matter what. The three hundred and fifty dollars he would soon have free certainly ought to purchase the shore piece. Perhaps—sometime in the future, somehow—he could buy in that elm-shaded pleasant knoll where he wanted to build the brick house modeled along the lines of the Buehler house on French Street.

Mr. Trunchard came to him two days later. He was satisfied with

Azial Baxter as a credit risk and had the transfer papers drawn up. Chid signed, feeling nervous. He had never before signed his name to any legal paper except the articles of the *Blessed Cause*.

"All right, you got a good claim and I got the land," Chid said. "Now, who is this party that wants it?"

"A man named Shallus, of Waterford."

"John Shallus?"

"Yes. Do you know him, Mr. Alwyn?"

"Do I know him! Why, Mr. Trunchard, it's John Shallus who owes Azial Baxter the money to cover your claim."

"Great Jehovah! What—?"

Mr. Trunchard exploded in a burst of uncontrollable laughter. He held his fat belly and shook, like a jolly St. Nick. A waistcoat button popped off. He sobered, watching it roll across the floor of the shanty, then laughed again until the tears stood in his eyes. Chid joined, laughing at the little man as well as with him. He hadn't laughed like that in months.

"Just picture it," Mr. Trunchard gasped. "John Shallus, providing you with capital so you can hook him for a profit! Mr. Alwyn, it's the grandest story on a Waterford man yet. Boy, oh, boy, wait'll the deal goes through—Lord love us, Mr. Alwyn, what a tale for Erie ears! I never—"

Chid left him still guffawing, trying to regain his breath.

He was needed on the brig staging, something about cutting the quarter-rail to accommodate the chaser guns. Profit or no profit, the building must go on. Without the fleet to make this region safe forever, there would never be profit, never be a great city of Erie, or a shipyard, never opportunity, or a brick house like the Buehler house.

Chid was writing his letter to John Shallus, offering him the timber land for four hundred dollars, cash money, when Mrs. Baxter knocked at his office door. It was Sunday and a cool overcast day. Work went on at the yard as always. The brigs appeared, to the inexperienced eye, to be complete. Lower masts were in place, gunports fixed, the hulls painted a somber black above the green waterline. But Chid knew the vast amount of work still to be done. No ship was ever finished when it looked to be finished. The body was there, but all the accoutrements to make the body useful were still needed. Men worked in small cramped interior spaces.

Their measurements here were in quarter-inches, not feet, and Chid's bold scheme of duplication of parts was of no value now. Used to broad tolerances in the rough outside work, they were suddenly confronted with intricate joiner and cabinet work, with the building of small fittings, cabin furnishings, bins and cubbies for the hundreds of items the Navy people demanded orderly storage for.

Riggers, doing what preliminary top hamper work they could, ran over the hulls like ants. Painters followed carpenters, hardly allowing the cleaning boys time to sweep up shavings and chips. Cross-legged sail-makers were busy in their fields of white canvas in the midship, the gunners watched the construction of their carriages like hens fussing over the hatching of their first broods, the seaman, and in the early evening the Marine Brigade also, drilled and practiced from stem to horn timber, from ballast dunnage to the half-completed lower tops.

The din, the babble of voices, the pounding of hammers, and the scream of rigging screws were nerve-racking. By these sounds alone, Chid knew exactly what was going on, even in his shanty at the head of the ways. He had learned to detach himself from the sounds, from the ships themselves. His own problems as foreman often were concerned with matters leagues away, with a shipment of supplies halfway up the Alleghany, with a tub of needed tallow held by a stubborn man in distant Meadville, with Nez and Antoine, seeking always in remote and far-off places for the stores he needed. Sometimes, at night, Chid ached with tiredness, as if he had received a terrific physical beating. He often slept with his clothes on and seldom reached the outdoor tables at the cook-house in time for a hot meal.

Even now, writing with little relish to John Shallus, phrasing his proposition carefully, he was on stolen time—

"Azial," said Mrs. Baxter, settling herself into the one chair of the shanty, "is over to the commissary unloading. He fetched Quaker flour and some salt meat he couldn't abide to stay downwind of, it stank so. I rode up with him. Mr. Alwyn, the land company surveyor was working over a piece near us t'other day. He said, when he came over to borrow some milk, that you bought it. I reckon that makes us neighbors, don't you?"

"Well," Chid said, "I bought it blind, ma'am, to resell quick. I didn't know it was near your place."

"Right southeast; the creek divides us. It set Azial to thinking, Mr. Alwyn. He always wanted a sawmill on the creek. Not that he's complaining about the opportunity you threw his way. We'll be eternal grateful for that, Mr. Alwyn. We were both pretty discouraged about the time you come along with that government freighting. But what's to happen to freighting now with the Navy boats almost built?"

"I wouldn't worry, ma'am. Azial's a prime boatman, he can always make a living on the river. Seems if Azial mentioned—meaning no offense, ma'am—that the sawmill idea was yours."

"I guess it was, Mr. Alwyn. Azial's a strong, willing man, but I've always done the brain work for him. I let on that ideas are his, it seems fitter that way. Well, I was thinking, Mr. Alwyn, why couldn't you and us combine? We have the mill site, Azial's a freighter. You have timber, Pittsburgh wants it."

"And who builds the mill?"

"Why, Azial has cash coming above what he owes you, and I cal'ate a man like yourself might have some tucked away."

"I haven't a cent except what the gov'ment owes me, Mrs. Baxter. Nor have I the time."

"My Lord!" Azial's wife exclaimed. "Ain't you made nothing out of this, Mr. Alwyn? Why, it seems we ought to log off that place just to hunker up with you. You've been fair and square with us, more than that."

"I'll think it over, ma'am," Chid said and closed a book over the letter to John Shallus. "I want money. I need it. The work on the fleet will be easing off soon. Might be, between then and when I'll be free in July, we could turn a dollar. But I wouldn't want to see the fleet suffer."

"I guess it'll be in Cap'n Perry's hands before then, Mr. Alwyn. You let me look into this thing. Azial's found a man in Pittsburgh who will take all the lumber he can get. He'll even sell us a water saw and the machinery on easy credit, he's so anxious."

"You seem to have it all figured out, ma'am."

"I have. A sawyer has a respectable station in life, Mr. Alwyn. We're gentlefolks. Azial was a barrel-stave manufacturer back in Peach Bottom

on the Susquehanna. I had a slate-stone house and four slaves and accounts with a dozen Philadelphia merchants. But when the embargo hit the rum and molasses trade in 1807, we lost everything almost overnight. We came here to the only thing we had left, Azial's land donation for fighting with the Pennsylvania Rifles. We tried farming, which is the only thing a poor man can do and be a freeman. But it didn't go, and Azial drifted to flatboating. Now, I'd give ten years of my life to have him in a decent civilized business again."

Azial's wagon lumbered to a stop outside the shanty. Chid escorted Mrs. Baxter to it and shook hands with the big freighter.

"I'm doin' famous," Azial grinned shyly when Chid asked about business. "Got 'leven men workin' for me, and two arks on the river all the time. We got to look over them boats soon, Chid, they're leakin' occasional, nuthin' serious but danged annoyin', times. Shallus loads down, nigh every trip, an' I'll have all he owes me by next week. The gov'ment stuff's thinnin' out, though; mebbe two-three weeks'll see it all carried here to Presque Isle. Mrs. has some ideas then."

"So she told me, Azial."

"I'd admire powerful to associate ourselves with you, Chid. You been like a blessed angel to us. I'd be proud to have you share some profits."

"Thanks, Azial. When the fleet is finished I can think about myself."

They drove off in the gathering dusk, Mrs. Baxter talking earnestly to the great patient man. The song of the peepers in the swales had turned into a full-throated frog chorus now. The forest leaves were large and heavy, many hid green nut clusters; the tall wild grass rustled with summer dryness when the hot south wind soughed gently over the rolling intervalles. The buffalo herds were moving east again, following the ancient traces, and the hair of the foxes and berry bears rubbed off in ragged tufts on the full, heavy thornbush and hazel and bull briar.

Chid sat in the gloom on a bilge block at the ways head for a long time. He had taken to smoking a cob pipe lately, and he found comfort in the sweet, mild Erie-cured tobacco now.

Mrs. Baxter's idea had much promise. If the trees on that land he had bought were logged off as ship's timber, the idea was bound to show profit. And as he had told her, he needed money, more money.

Suppose the company which had the option on the lake tract refused

to sell him the shore piece? He'd have to offer to buy the whole tract—at a profit to them, of course. Suppose the land company failed to take up the option? It would then take a thousand dollars to buy the whole tract. And he had, if the government did not delay the money due him still longer, less than four hundred.

He had no difficulty in analyzing his problems clearly. It was not unlike planning a complicated bit of carpentry for the ships. All the ifs, buts, and whens must be weighed and considered, given their proper value, brought into focus.

"The only real if," Chid muttered, knocking out the ash heel of the cob pipe, "is this war. If a man could be sure who would win, there'd be no risk in trying almost anything."

But he did not complete the letter to John Shallus that night.

He hoped that Mr. Trunchard had not told that story around. If he had, John Shallus might be the one who would do the laughing yet.

"Tomorrow," Mr. Brown said, "we are going to launch the brigs. I had hopes that Mr. Carmody would be well enough to make the last inspection. He isn't, and I'm asking you to do it, Chid."

Chid felt the honor keenly. Upon his word two great ships, certified worthy by himself, would plunge into the lake.

"How early tomorrow?" Chid asked.

"As early as possible; you can inspect today. The wind is north, from off the lake, and I think it will hold. You'll have the deepest water with such a wind."

"All right," Chid said. "You watch, Mr. Brown, say an hour after sun-up. I reckon the fleet'll be ready for fighting right soon now. I was wondering what the next job is."

"I suppose," Noah Brown said with a smile, "that I could let you go like the others. But I'm not going to. I have plans for you, Chidsy, saying you are willing when the time comes."

"It depends on what they are."

"Of course it does. On the last day of July you will be a journeyman shipwright; we'll talk about it then. Meantime, there are still a few things to be done on the brigs after they are launched."

"The supplies are almost all here now."

"Thanks to you and Mr. Baxter. Chidsy, I want to talk to you about that requisition. The Congress or some busybody in the Navy Department has seen fit to challenge the price you paid for the arks. I'm defending your action. But there'll be delay, I'm afraid."

"They were cheap," Chid said, suddenly angry.

"Cheap at any price, we needed them so badly," Mr. Brown agreed. "The Army people also feel that inasmuch as your Indians were not enlisted and did not take the oath, they are not entitled to pay. I'm sorry, Chidsy. That's—well, Washington. I'll fight to the death for you, and I have no doubt we'll collect in time."

"Sometimes I feel's if I'd been a plain damn' fool."

"I don't, Chidsy, and I've advanced thousands and thousands. I'd do it again tomorrow."

"Well, I don't reckon I would, Mr. Brown. But it won't make any difference," Chid said, not wanting to talk about it. "Just let me get those brigs launched. I know what to do about all this."

"Nothing rash, Chidsy?"

"Nothing that anybody else isn't doing," Chid said defiantly and hurried to the Cascade yard.

He was absorbed in his inspection of the two brigs all the rest of the day. They were well and beautifully built. Live-oak sheathing protected them from some feet beneath the waterline to the rail cap. Each brig was pierced for twenty guns, though the guns had not yet arrived. The upper masts and yards lay on the smooth white deck ready for hoisting aloft, almost completely rigged. The strong, delightful odor of Stockholm tar, taken from the Britisher which he and Nez and Antoine had captured, filled the still, warm air. A handy-billy snaked gun-carriages and water butts and hatch covers and gratings up a skid-plank from the side of the launching ways to the deck, and over the whole scene there was a gay holiday spirit. The long job was almost completed. Chid felt a fierce jealous pride in the brigs, overshadowing even the discouragement of his talk with Noah Brown.

"When you leavin', Chid?" a carpenter asked, oiling his tools.

"When Perry accepts the ships, I s'ppose. Three-four weeks, maybe."

"Hell, me an' the York State fellers leave directly after the launchin'. Brown's cuttin' down on the gang."

"Where you heading?"

"Dunno. The coast, I reckon. They's scads o' buildin' goin' on there, I hear. You ought to get in on it—easy work an' damn' good pay, not like here."

"I don't want to leave particular."

"You don't! God, I hated ev'ry secunt o' this. Worst is, I don't see no damn' sense in the hull thing. Lookit that bay."

"What's the matter with it?"

"It's lowerin'. Inches a day—Christ knows but hosses'll have to drag these ships inter the lake yet. How's Perry figurin' to clear the bar?"

"Light, of course."

"Aye; light, you say. That means without guns nor shot nor fightin' gear. What's to happen when the ships get t'other side with no guns, an' the goddamn' enemy's waitin' fer 'em?"

"There's depth over the bar; there will be for some time, I reckon."

"How long? D'you or Perry or Brown know?"

"Nope."

"Well, then, like I say, what's the sense?"

"You talk like a Tory. Perry and Noah Brown have it all figured out. The way supplies are coming in now, they'll have these brigs ready in a couple of weeks; long before the lake goes down or the British organize a squadron. Their *Detroit* ain't even launched yet."

"All right. Say they have it figured out—but damned if I got as much faith as they have. Where's the crew to man these here ships? I lay there ain't three hundred in the barracks."

"Oh, they'll come," Chid said. "You'd better keep working even if it is your last day."

He left the man. His words were too near the truth to be cheerful. Chid wanted the fleet to be everything it was expected to be. But he could do nothing for it except what he was doing—keep faithfully at the building and do as he was ordered in the terse notes that came from Mr. Brown's chamber, and now too from George Carmody, who had been established on a couch in front of the Cascade joiner loft.

He was not worried about the lake level. Dan Dobbins, back from Black Rock, had been exploring the bar for the best passage, and had reported that, unless the lake dropped to unheard-of summer levels, the

ships could be taken over. The plan was to reduce the weight in each broadside to four guns, and to carry only enough shot for serving them ten times each. The schooners and, if Perry's attack on Fort George proved successful, the Niagara River vessels as well, were to anchor in a protecting cordon in the lake beyond the bar to hold off any attacking British squadron. Chid noted with satisfaction that many new earth-works had been dug on the outer peninsula. These waited now only for guns. Perhaps Azial Baxter was poling them up the Allegany this moment. Real Taylor, who was not an optimist, had pronounced the protection of these batteries sufficient, and declared that a gun on a steady land platform was worth three on a rolling ship.

Dobbins believed the bar would permit the passage of the brigs if they drew seven feet or less. Chid, scaling the building model, found that their designed draught was a trifle better than nine feet. It would not be difficult to strip them of enough unimportant gear, including some ballast and all the spare yards and spars and stores, to a seven-foot draught.

Work ceased on the two brigs at sundown. It was odd, this night, watching so many of the men fold their aprons and stow the oiled tools in the great chests burned with the inscription *Noah Brown, New York*. Chid completed his inspection in the warm summer dusk. They were good ships; as good as New England men could build, as good as his own *Ariel*. He told it so to George Carmody, and Carmody, nodding, thanked him for taking over his job.

"What you onto, then, Alwyn?" Carmody asked.

"Same thing. I'm staying, I guess."

Carmody looked at him tiredly. Like all the victims of the lake fever, the disease had wasted him away to gaunt skinniness.

"Was I young an' any venture remained in my bones, danged if I wouldn't try this country. It's good land, Alwyn. Time'll see it prosperous an' settled. A feller gettin' in previous, might do well for himself."

It pleased Chid to know that he was not alone in his hopes for Erie. Carmody's opinion was important; he was a famous foreman, and Noah Brown's right hand.

Nez swung into his path from the martingale rigging of the brig which Perry had selected to be his flagship. He reached for his shoulder knife and solemnly cut his leather apron into shreds. He had again been

assigned to a carpenter's gang after it became apparent that the surrounding country had been stripped of everything of use to the fleet.

"I been lookin' for'ard to this for some time," Nez said. "Ain't it funny, Chid, I mean waitin' on doin' it when I could've done it any time? Trouble was, I didn't want to. Somehow it's all different now. The job's done, so far as we can do it, an' it sort of gives a man a freedom."

"You're finished, too, Nez?"

"Sure thing. So's Antwine. Chid, I wish you was comin' with us."

"Are you heading back to Portersville, Nez?"

"Not me! You forget we're in trouble on the coast, Chid? Antwine an' me is aimin' to meet up with the Green Mountains an' his Otter Crick. We'll go east with the gang to the Genesee an' then to Albany. From there we'll bushwhack. If they been huntin' o' us in that region, it's done by now, an' we'll be safe's a pair o' muskrats under ice. We'd both like to have you join us, Chid."

"I'm staying on. For good, Nez. Didn't I mention the shipyard?"

"Certain, you did. But I didn't believe it."

"Well, you can now. Nez, I always figured you and Antoine would kind of be with me in it."

"What in tarnation could we do, Chid? Goda'mighty, you know I don't like the trade—it's just a go-by for me, suthin' to do whilst I'm waitin' for suthin' else to do. Antwine, he never would have come savin' for that trouble."

"I suppose," Chid said. "Nez, don't get drunk tonight."

"Huh! Won't I, though. We're goin' to drink Erie dry's a witch's soul. Man, that's freedom. We kind o' earned it, Chid. I feel proud as hell o' what I did here; it'll let me live with myself for a long time to come. It's up to Perry an' his boys now."

"I reckon, Nez. A man can't be expected to do more'n his duty."

Chid walked to the village in the twilight with a feeling of dejection and loneliness. He felt some better after he had stopped at Mr. Trunchard's house and sold him his claim against the government for exactly half price. "It's a handsome interest," said Mr. Trunchard, "even if I have to wait a year, like you say. I'm satisfied, Mr. Alwyn."

"You told the story on Shallus yet?"

"Oh, no. I'm saving it."

"Well," Chid said, "if I were you I wouldn't mention it."

He had a noggin of rum at Stone's and called for a quill and ink. His hasty letter to Azial Baxter and his wife was short. The money enclosed would do the real talking.

Go ahead. I'll be down first chance I get to show you how to cut the trees. The arks are mine until they are paid for by the government. I contribute them and the timber. It is getting terribly dry up here, but I think that we can send most of what we cut before the river drops too low....

At the shanty he tore up the letter to John Shallus.

He could hear the celebrating carpenters whooping it at Stone's. He would almost have liked to be with them, but his head ached like sin tonight. He wondered if he had a touch of sun.

But he remembered suddenly that there had been no sun that day.

Mrs. Slinker knelt silently beside a small rounded mound on the barren sand dune above the placid waters of Misery Bay. Sand spurs and wire grass crept from the near-by sparse dune growth, covering the raw yellow earth with harsh pale green tracery. An unpainted wooden cross, branded with the initials T. S., stood at the head of the rounded grave. Tonk's mother did not know that it was piece of the *Ariel*, that her son himself had engraved those stark silent letters.

The long trip from Portersville had been terrifying. She had been alone, as she now would be for the rest of her life. Her husband had died on an English prison hulk after being impressed from a New London China packet. Tonk had been all that remained of him.

Mrs. Slinker prayed in a faint weary murmur, her purse clutched tightly in her clasped hands, her eyes closed, facing the great blue lake. She did not see the three sails which burst suddenly from the bay behind her and raced madly in chase of another larger sail which had come winging from the north. Once she was faintly aware of cheering and the booming of cannon in some far-off place across the water. But she prayed on. There was so much that she wanted to tell God about Tonk.

After a long while she dried her eyes. She replaced the wet handkerchief in the purse. Then she drew from the purse a small battered wooden

doll. Bits of printed red cotton clung to it, as if the doll had at one time been clothed. Gently, stilling her trembling hands, she scooped out a shallow hole in the soft sand and placed the doll tenderly in it. She drew the purse string tight again. Save for the handkerchief, it was empty.

Mrs. Slinker rose slowly to her feet, a heavy, large-footed woman, perhaps once pretty. She did not cry as she walked down the hill to the shore where the boat waited.

Antoine helped her into the rowing gig and manned the oars without speaking.

"I—I had to see—where he was," said Mrs. Slinker, almost belligerently after a while.

"Yas, ma'am," Antoine nodded gravely. "Ah t'ink Ah un'erstan', me, ma'am. Tonk she was goo' boy, Ah t'ink."

"He used to play with the doll, Mr. Marestière. He was never without it, not till he was grown almost. Every night when he—he went to sleep he had to have it with him. It made him rest peaceful."

"Yas, ma'am," said Antoine and pulled strongly. "Ah t'ink Ah hear de cheer an' de shoots when de brigs she is la'nch'."

"Tonk was a good boy," Mrs. Slinker said. "His father made the doll, out of a timber from the *Oliver Cromwell*, when we lived at Saybrook. Tonk was born in Saybrook, Mr. Marestière."

Antoine rowed rapidly. It was almost two miles across the bay. Mrs. Slinker sat motionless and alone on the stern thwart. She looked back toward Misery Bay only once. They landed at the stone mole.

"Ah t'ink Cap Dobbins she sail to Black Rock tonight, ma'am," Antoine said helping her out. "Is better you sail wit' she."

"No," said Mrs. Slinker, "I spent every copper I have in the world to come up here. I must find work in Erie."

"Bah Gar," Antoine snorted, "is bad, bad place, here. War, ma'am, she come, ver' bad war wit' beeg battle, wit' British, wit' tam Injun!"

"I know," Mrs. Slinker smiled quietly. "But Tonk would like to have me near him, Mr. Marestière. Do you think Mr. Stone might be needing a kitchen maid?"

"She better was, ma'am, she better was," Antoine replied softly. "Ah don' reckon Ah know what de boys she do on dat Stone she don' fin' you good work, ma'am."

Chapter Seventeen

CHID AND NEZ LEFT the homeward-bound shipbuilders on the board sidewalk in front of the Buffalo, Mohawk, and Ontario Bank on Schimmelpennick Avenue. Chid had fourteen dollars in his pocket. He had received it, standing in line with Noah Brown's men, from a mustachioed dandy behind an ornate wooden grille in the bank's bare public room.

"Note for twenty dollars," the dandy had intoned loftily to a scribbling clerk at his side, "favor of Chidsy Alwyn, Portersville, Connecticut. Signed Noah Brown, countersigned, Stephen Gowdy, paymaster clerk, United States Navy, Lake Erie Squadron. Wages for the months of—for heaven's sake, Charlie, just ditto it; it's like all the others. Mr. Alwyn, this note discounts to fourteen dollars."

"You've been giving sixteen for twenty," Chid had protested.

"Not for Connecticut residence, only New York State. If that note goes bad, we got to go clear to Connecticut Courts to collect. Two dollars is cheap for the extra risk. Take it or leave it."

"I intend to stay in Erie. That's only ninety miles away."

"Look here, young fellow, you can't change residence like you change a shirt to cheat this bank. If you don't like our offer, take your paper down to one of the sharks on Boston Row. But don't come crying to me later."

"I'll take the fourteen," Chid had said sourly and endorsed the note over to the bank.

He wasn't the only one who growled. Most of the men cashed only enough pay notes to take them home. But Chid needed all of his money. In Buffalo, where everything was high because of the war, even fourteen dollars wouldn't go far toward outfitting him for his call on Mary.

They walked uphill, away from the water front where the *Salina* had landed them at noon. Nez steered Chid into a cheap tavern and ordered

dunder. "Not, y'nderstand, for likkor's sake," Nez grinned wryly and pressed his temples. "Today it's medicine, Chid. It's a human necessity after that last night at Erie. Did you toot too? You look damn peaked, Chid."

"No, I tried to work on my chandlery accounts, but I had a queer aching tiredness all over. I slept till Dan clapped his sailing bell."

"Jing!—you missed suthin', I tell you. We nigh made a shambles o' Stone's, the greedy lout a-grabbin' for our score with one hand an' callin' for peace with the other like we had no right to cut loose after all these months. I reckon he was kind o' sore on account o' Mrs. Slinker. Antwine give it to him straight—he skips her wages once or works her too hard an' the hull Navy'll be on him an' wreck his goddamn' place. She's a very nice woman, Chid—when you go back you ought to keep your eye on her."

"I'll watch to see she makes out all right, Nez. I only hope she gets over Tonk. It hit her terrible hard. But she only cried once when I told her about cutting those initials out of the *Ariel's* stem for Tonk's grave. She said it was the nicest thing his friends could have done for him. I'm glad that Moses and Mary could take her with them as far as here. It must have been an awful trip all alone."

"Well," Nez said, "you never would have known your girl was only ninety miles away but for Mrs. Slinker. You hollered for time off loud enough when you heard. What you goin' to do, Chid?"

"Ask Mary to marry me," Chid said. "It's about time I got that settled, too."

"By Gee! Chid Alwyn married!" Nez laughed. "You're gettin' too damn' civilized for your friends, Chid, I swear."

This main avenue was handsomely wide. Sixteen-foot board sidewalks lined the rutted dirt road. Sapling elms studded the street; iron-bound hitching posts and half-log watering troughs graced the frontage of the largest shops; in several places, especially in the neighborhood of the tony Niagara Hotel, near the hub of several wide avenues, covered wooden awnings extended over the sidewalk. Wagons, light rigs, and mounted riders, citizens, soldiers, farmers, and backwoodsmen made a busy, purposeful traffic.

They joined the late morning throng, Chid in search of a barber, Nez

killing time until George Carmody had arranged for coaches to take the party east. Chid looked forward with anticipation to the haircut and shave, conscious here in a city of his ragged appearance and his worn leather-patched frontier clothing. His hair was bleached to a golden yellow, falling in neck-long curls to his cotton shirt, covering his ears. He walked with a long swinging stride, shoulders back, missing nothing of the strange busy place.

Buffalo, he thought, was almost as big as New London, the only other town of size he knew. He supposed that New York, possibly Albany also, were as large. But he had passed through these places at night and had not seen them. He couldn't begin to estimate the commerce of such a city. But in peacetime it must be vast. Coming in that morning he had seen the many wharves and storehouses in the harbor. *Now you take about two hundred tonners, Chid thought, not too deep, with an easy-handled fore-and-aft rig, high booms to accommodate good deck loads—they'd make good lake carriers. Or steamboats. A-yep—steamboats; Alwyn-built steamboats—to carry that commerce faster and safer than sailers.* These lakes *were* worth fighting for, worth dreaming for—

They came to a wedge-shaped piece of grassless land between two brick stores, tightly surrounded by crowding buildings. In the center of the lot stood a dirty tent with red pole patches. People stood in line before its curtained door. Transparencies, gaudily lettered and illustrated, hung from a rope stretched in front of the tent. These announced:

AN AFRICAN LION

LIVING! BREATHING! ROARING! FEEDING!

This Noble ANIMAL is between four and five feet HIGH and measures 10 FEET 3 INCHES from tail tuft to nostrils and is of a beautiful DUN COLOR. He is eight years old and weighs better than SEVENTY STONE. His limbs and tail are THICKER than those of the common ox. The BEAST is a native of Goree in Africa. He is under excellent subjection and is amply WORTHY of the contemplation of the curious and the inquisitive.

For the better accommodation of those who wish to view the LION, the owner has been to considerable expense to fit a room where Gentlemen and LADIES can all have seats. The LION will be let loose to perform twice every hour and will be FED a WHOLE SHEEP each afternoon at four o'clock.

The price of admission to the LION ROOM is
25¢ to grown persons
(Children half price)

Nez wanted to see the beast, but Chid felt that he could not afford the price of admission. "I reckon anyway," Nez consoled himself "'twould be better seein' the critter eat up that sheep at four o'clock. Do you s'pose the sheep's alive, Chid?"

"I don't think so, Nez. This is a civilized city. They probably have laws against feeding living food to animals."

"I reckon. By God, I hope Antwine's country ain't so damn' fancy. It's downright depressin', such folderol."

The shops were all open and doing a good business. Chid steered Nez into one which bore the name of M. Abrams, Gentleman's Draper. Chid knew the moment he entered the cool, darkened front parlor that he could not afford M. Abrams' prices. He took one look at the expensive tailoring and frilled shirts and London bolt goods on display and fled before the echo of the spring bell on the door had ceased jingling. They hurried up the avenue. Two doors west on Seminary Street they found the Empire Merchandizing Company. Its stock was displayed all over the front of the unpainted wooden building, pails and lanterns and farm tools intermixed with denim work clothes and ready-made pants and boots dancing in the breeze.

"This is more like," Chid grinned. "How much do you think I ought to save out for the haircut, Nez?"

Nez reached into his shirt collar for his knife.

"Stoop over," he said. "'Twon't cost you a copper."

"No you don't," Chid cried, ducking Nez's clutch. "I reckon when a man asks a girl to marry him he's got to look his very best."

"Yes, it'll help. But I don't reckon you'll have any trouble with Mary

Leet. I'm kind o' surprised it ain't all settled—you was lovin' on her back home. Hell, even I knew it, Chid."

"I never asked her right out, Nez. We both know—only I guess the words have to be spoke. She's staying at the Niagara Hotel with Commodore Chauncey's sister while Moses went down toward Fort Niagara to see about the schooners bottled up there. They got to be ready to scoot to Presque Isle the minute Perry and the Ontario fleet open up the river to the lake. I'm—I'm to see her tonight."

"A reg'lar date?"

"A-yep. I sent her a note by Sylvester Tatro, and she replied. You can't just storm in on a girl you want to propose to."

"Depends on the gal, Chid. But I can see some sense tacklin' Mary Leet the way you are. She was alwus kind o'—well, real ladylike."

Chid bought a pair of strong sensible gray cotton pants, a pale-blue shirt to which was attached one of the new-style soft collars, a plain salt and pepper surcoat with hide-lined pockets, and a pair of thick-topped laced boots. He needed no hat during the summer; he had four pair of socks and a suit of jersey small clothes which Mrs. Slinker insisted he accept from Tonk's traveling chest.

"Now for galluses, young man," the spry elderly clerk said to Chid, "I'd recommend these—the very latest, from Providence, and I want you to observe that the elasticity is provided by a genuine India rubber link—none of your cheap iron spring yokes that cause cancer of the stomach."

"I've got rope galluses, they're good enough."

"Mister, if you'll take these galluses at fifty cents extra to the lot, I'll throw in, absolutely free, a pretied cravat. You'll never again need a mirror—silvering is that scarce since the war—I doubt if you can even buy a new mirror—and your knot will always look neat, attractive to the female eye, which, as a man of your obvious experience undoubtedly knows, is expert in the detection of the most minute—"

"All right," Chid said, hefting the spring of the galluses, "I'll take them."

It came to just under twelve dollars. He considered it worth the money. He wanted Mary to see him as different, as successful. She must know now, when he again spoke of the Alwyn Shipyard, of what he wanted to

do at Erie, of that challenging steamboat, that he was not still dreaming. These clothes, new and stiff and so carefully selected for tasteful harmony, were symbols; they were proof that he had risen to foremanship, that he would soon be a fully certified journeyman, that, back in Erie, he owned timber land, was a partner in a producing sawmill, that he was on the way to becoming a man of station and means. A girl, he reckoned, would want to be assured of those things, not merely have them recited to her.

He had the clothing bundled and tucked it under his arm. He would change, make the transformation, at the barber parlor.

The barber, in the basement of the Lyceum Theater on Court Street, was busy. A company of Geneva Volunteer Rifles, from Fort Niagara, had descended upon him. They were ragged men, gaunt and weather-beaten, but jubilantly cheerful about going home at last.

"Our time run out in April," a corporal told Chid, "but we had to wait till yestiddy to get our pay. We been two months over our enlistments."

"You mean to say you got paid?" Nez snorted.

"Notes, mister, only pay notes. An' do they discount 'em scandalous in this damn' town! Well, the hell with this war from now on, sez I."

"I thought Chauncey was moving on Fort George?" Chid said.

"We been hearin' so for ages. But nuthin' ever happens when Chauncey's the boss, mister. If he is movin', we need some co-ordination. That's what's the matter with this whole war, there ain't no goddamn' co-ordination."

"There will be now. Oliver Hazard Perry is with him."

"Oh, the feller from Erie?" the corporal asked. "Well, mebbe he can do it. I hear he's quite a do-er. Some o' our boys've been itchin' to get under him for some excitement, but they can't get no orders through to shift 'em. You men know this Perry?"

"We've been building his fleet. We both know Perry pretty good."

"By golly!" the corporal cried warmly and shook hands. "I'm right honored to meet up with you. Come an' meet some o' my boys, men."

They shook hands all around. Somebody passed a bottle of rum. Chid answered their questions about Presque Isle and the Erie fleet with pride. Evidently, Noah Brown's efforts were not unknown to the rank and file. The Rifles made Chid feel like a minor hero. "I'd enlist again

could I be sure o' gettin' down to Erie. There's goin' to be a dandy scrap there, I'd say," the corporal said. "Well, sorry to keep you boys waitin' on yer haircuts. We'll be all out in two-three hours."

Chid and Nez sauntered along Schimmelpennick Avenue, taking in the sights, killing time. Toward the end of the afternoon, they met Antoine idling along the avenue. He was still in his soiled leatherstockings and moccasins, a strange dress even in the strange variety of dress in Buffalo. He was enthusiastic about seeing the lion eat the sheep at four o'clock and agreed to accompany Nez to the exhibition tent.

"Is samt'ing to tell de hwoman, dat," he said solemnly. "*Mon Dieu, la lion!*"

"You got a woman on the Otter, Antwine?" Nez inquired, looking worried.

"O, non! But she will be, Ah t'ink, Nez. Always, she is, hein?"

They said their good-byes between the barber parlor and the lion tent.

"This ain't for good, Chid," Nez said with sudden gravity, pressing Chid's hand.

"'Course not, Nez. I reckon you'll always wander, but every once in so often you'll show up. But you'll find me at Erie unless everything turns out wrong."

Antoine tried to be gay, but Chid could see that the little Canuck was affected by the leave-taking. After all, they had been through a lot together; the ties of those experiences could not be dissipated by a mere farewell.

"Antoine, if you ever run against that coast trouble, don't aggravate it," Chid offered.

"She not trouble, Cheed, 'cause Antoine is not catched, hein? No catch, free lak hell. Ah not worry, me."

"I wish that I could feel that way about it."

"Is but dat Mis' Bolt say de truth. Den is hall right, hever' t'ing."

"Bolt is probably dead. He was wounded bad. Meanwhile we got Captain Farlow's report against us, that and our escape from the *Blessed Cause*."

"In de hwoods," Antoine said soberly, "Ah meet wit' de nest from de hornet. Is not trouble, Cheed; non. But poke hims wit' de stick. . . . *Mon Dieu!* Is tam trouble, dan; she. Cheed, don' poke."

"I reckon that's fair advice, Antoine. Trouble is, for me it ain't only a question of saving my hide, like 'tis for you and Nez. This thing threatens my plans and my future. Twenty years from now it could appear and ruin everything I hope to have by then."

Antoine swung a contemplative moccasined toe in a broad arc on the plank wall. "Cheed," he said, "don't have nozzing. Always dat mak trouble. Be lak de hanimal; she not hongry, she not col', nozzing else do she want. No trouble, no danger; happy lak hell all de tam."

"Until," said Chid, "some hunter comes along."

"Den de hanimal, she bite; she claw. A-r-r! You t'ink too tam much, Cheed. De brain, she is for to live wit' now; not nex' mont'."

Antoine, oddly, had tears in his eyes. Chid offered his hand. The little Canuck took it, pressing it sincerely, but he suddenly threw his arms around Chid and kissed him on the cheek. "Gardamn," he whispered, "don' b'lieve Antoine, Cheed. Is no good for feller lak you. *Mon ami, adieu!*"

Chid left them with an odd feeling of envy. They and the departing shipbuilders were free men. They were going back to New England and New York and Jersey, to home and family and familiar things. He had elected to stay in this new land, which was still to be won and made safe. They had come as free men, attracted by good pay and subsistence, standards of duty and notions of patriotism; they had been swayed and inspired by the appeal of able recruiters, perhaps by fife music and the dashing swirl of a wind-whipped flag. They had growled and revolted and criticized. But they had stayed and done the job; done it well and in quicker time than any gang had ever built a fleet before. Chid knew that he would miss them keenly. They talked his language, thought, and reacted as he did. They were New England men. Walking up the avenue again, Chid was suddenly strongly conscious of the flat, toneless speech of those he passed. Yes, he would miss that coastal twang, those resonant nasal tones which spoke of the rote thundering into sea caves and the growl of tide on the mud flats and eternal sea wind in the dwarfed misshapen sand cedars.

The barber would be busy with the Rifles for an hour yet. Chid idled with a curious restlessness, thinking that perhaps he ought to rehearse what he wanted to say to Mary. He wished that Moses, who understood

and loved them both, was here in Buffalo. Somehow, having Moses near, knowing how he felt about it all, would have made it easier.

He felt a momentary panic. It had been a long time since they had seen each other. Perhaps Mary had changed. Without doubt he had. But he remembered those letters from Mary, not the words but the impression of them. They were from the same girl, from the girl who lived in his heart and peopled his every dream.

With sudden anger, he felt resentment at the necessity of putting his heart into words, of asking *the* question, of dressing in new stiff clothes, wearing a cravat—the first he had ever owned in his life. Well, it had to be done. He wondered if he ought to drop to his knees, make a wordy plea, say things which he felt but which would sound ridiculous between two people who had lived together as children, had shared joy and disappointment and punishment like brother and sister. He remembered suddenly a page in a schoolbook long forgotten, in the back of the book, following the examples of promissory notes and “A Letter of Recommendation” and “To Congratulate a Young Lady Upon Graduation from a Female Academy.” “While it is never proper or respectful to propose marriage except by the ardent spoken word,” Chid remembered, “in cases of dire necessity, understood by both parties, it is permissible to address a polite note to the feminine LOVED ONE. Such a note should be written (with quill and ink only) upon carefully selected tinted paper of quality and taste, as follows: (My) Dear Miss—, We have known each other for—years. During this time the respect and friendship which I have always entertained for you has grown into what those of far greater literary attainments than myself so eloquently describe as love...”

“Nope,” Chid growled to himself. “Mary would hate me. I reckon I better say it right out.”

He hadn’t eaten anything since the rough breakfast on the *Salina* at dawn, but he did not feel hungry now. There was a curious gnawing in the region of his stomach, but it was not hunger. He stopped and lighted his cob pipe. The tobacco tasted sweet and comforting; it settled that strange, expectant gnawing.

On a street corner he joined a small crowd which was watching a tall, bony man mount an upturned vinegar cask. The man’s horse stood

drowsily in the thick dust, saddle bags bulging, the saddle worn and shining like oiled mahogany.

The man took a small Indian war drum from a saddle bag and began to beat it. His neck jerked forward in rhythm as he beat, as if it were attached to him by a hinge concealed directly beneath the wide flaring collar. "Arouse ye! Arouse ye!" he croaked loudly. "Hear! Oh, come all ye! Closer, friends, make room for those on the outer fringes of good news, please. Hear! Hear!"

Chid pressed close, standing beside a second upturned cask. He puffed on the pipe comfortably. The sun was lowering. Farm wagons began to move out of the city in lazy dust clouds; a few stopped to listen to the bony man, drivers hunched on the seats chin in hand.

"Do you know," the orator suddenly cried, shaking a lean accusing finger at his audience, "that the inhabitants of the United States consume more tobacco than any other civilized nation on earth, the Turks only excepted? Do you know that, my friends? Are you ambitious to bear away the palm from the Mohammedans for those unenviable qualities which that indolent, ignorant, and barbarous nation of smokers and chewers proverbially possess?"

He put down the drum and glared fiercely at them.

"Hark, I say! It is difficult to contemplate man in more absurd and abased light than in his attachment to tobacco; a weed even more nauseous to the taste than it is unfriendly to health and morals. I assert on the highest authority that the use of tobacco impairs the appetite, it promotes indigestion through the waste of saliva in chewing and smoking, it produces many of the disorders which are seated in the nerves, as tremors of the hands, headache, epilepsy, palsy, apoplexy and—spare the thought—barrenness in female slaves of the weed! Moreover, the hot smoke of tobacco has destroyed a whole set of teeth in three months. Chewing fouls the mouth and necessarily renders the breath and the immediate atmosphere extremely offensive. The use of snuff injures the voice, obstructs the nose, and causes blackheads in the vicinity of the nostrils."

The speaker frowned upon his audience. His eyes fixed on Chid with menace. "Young man," he thundered, "will you kindly step up on this barrel?"

Chid obeyed before he had time to think. He found himself beside

the bony man looking over the heads of the crowd. He had no time to retreat; the long fingers clutched his left arm, holding him there.

"Observe, my friends," the inexorable voice went on. "Oh, gaze and hang your heads in shame that you are blood brothers! Here we have a fine appearing young man—tall and straight, bronzed in the sun of God—yet from his mouth protrudes the very same device which relieves the steamboat and sawmill of its waste combustion. Do you drink spirits, young man?"

"A-yep," Chid said belligerently. "You better let go of me."

"Aha! As I thought. Friends, what more proof is necessary? Tobacco has given this young man a thirst for strong spirits. It has turned him from a dutiful son into a drunken idler, a loathesome wastrel, a blemish upon Christian society, unfit to lick the boots of those who..."

Chid stiffened suddenly, his eyes riveted on the outer edge of the tight crowd about him. He continued to puff his cob pipe, now with frantic confused haste, burning his tongue. He wasn't sure at first. But he could never forget the way she held her head; the way the sun shone on her red-gold hair.

"Arouse, then, oh, ye snuff-takers and chewers and smokers! Exert yourselves to cast off the destructive evil. But be warned, it is no task for weak mortal flesh, friends. God has mercifully revealed to me a helpful formulae, a magic potion which, if taken three times daily from this large-sized bottle which is yours for the small sum of one dollar—"

Chid clutched his bundle, ran his hand frantically over his coarse tattered clothing. His unkempt yellow hair tickled his ears. He took his glowing cob pipe from his teeth.

"...will positively discourage forever the use of tobacco in any form. And what is more, friends—Owww!"

Chid had spilled the hot pipe into the large collar of the bony man. The clutching fingers relaxed, flew upward, beating. Chid clouted the man in the stomach. It was good to hear the agonized grunt, to smell the faint aroma of burning hair and scorched cotton cloth.

He jumped from the barrel, pushed through the uproarious laughter. "Mary!"

"Chid! Oh, Chid!"

Together they ran down Schimmelpennick Avenue. But no one chased

them. Chid could hear the howls of the owner of the magic potion above the slap of their footsteps, above the pounding of his heart.

The cook on the *Salina* gave them fried pork and warm buttermilk and Utica cheese and a big basket of drop biscuits for supper. They were like strangers at first, eying each other across the stanchion table in the after-cabin, eating carefully.

Yes, Moses was looking after the schooners and the *Caledonia* brig, making them ready for the lake. He should not have gone; he was still terribly weak and ought to do no more than superintend the cutting of the timber as he had promised. But this had been so important. Yes, Mrs. Slinker had had to come by way of Sackett's Harbor. That's how she had happened to join them on the journey west. Oh, the note—why, yes, she had received it with surprise, she had no idea that he was so near. Really, only ninety miles?

"You had a bundle," Chid said, brushing his hair back with his palms, "I hope I didn't interrupt an errand, Mary."

"No, you didn't. You had one too."

"New clothes," Chid said blushing. "I was heading for a barber's. I wanted to look—well, kind of good tonight . . ."

"Yes, Chid? I—I had a new dress in my bundle."

"You did?"

"Dark blue, Chid, with plain sleeves and Salem loom stitching on the—the front. I only ordered it after your note came."

"You did? By jing, Mary."

They went on deck, watching the sun go down into the lake. Chid told her about himself since that long-ago in Portersville. He worked in a guarded hint of the shipyard and his partnership with Azial Baxter, sort of implied that there was more to these things than his bare words said. Mary listened and said nothing. Their shoulders touched, sitting close on the after-trunk, and they drew away quickly. The night wind picked up. The rigging of the little vessel began its chorded hum; loosely furled sails rustled as if eager for the hour of departure.

"We don't sail till midnight," Chid said. "We could walk."

"Yes," Mary said quietly. "I'd love to walk along the beach."

They rested on a bleached squared log, half-buried in the shingle, near

a clump of wild blackberry not so far from the *Salina's* berth. It was dark now, the sky a soft velvet pricked with silver. Fish splashed in the still pools in the lee of the ragged offshore reefs; back country a whippoorwill lashed a shrill, desperate song. Chid wondered wildly if his breath rendered the immediate atmosphere offensive. What a shameful show that had been!

"I—I wanted to be in—better clothes, Mary," Chid said. "I haven't had much time to think about them, but—"

"Your clothes are all right, Chid. They're as good as a uniform, I guess."

"That's a nice thing to say. I should have let Nez hack my hair with his sheath knife like he wanted to."

"I'm glad that you didn't, Chid. You used to wear your hair long like this always. I—I used to envy you. Mine won't grow except in tight curls."

"Curls look good on you."

"You used to pull them and say they looked like cedar shavings."

"By jing, did I?"

He could feel Mary close at his side, feel the brush of those tight curls against his neck. They did not draw away when their shoulders touched. In the darkness, driving people close together, it was different.

"You used to tease me terribly, Chid."

"I did? Well, I don't reckon I'd do it any more, Mary."

He wanted desperately to smoke. But he could not afford to remind her of how they had met this afternoon. She had not mentioned it—and that was kind of her. The light breeze was cool as always, damp and chilly.

"Are you cold, Mary?"

"Just a little, Chid. But it's so lovely here, watching the stars. Tell me about Erie. Is it—civilized, Chid?"

He let his arm steal around her, resting it lightly against her waist, feeling her sigh snugly against him. Erie, Chid explained, was pretty crude. But lots of men had faith in it, risked their savings and their reputations and their future on what Erie might become. Why, just take the lake trade, in peacetime...

The whippoorwill moved many times, calling his song of yearning from the flat slate rocks. After a while Mary laid her head on Chid's

shoulder. He could feel her breath soft on his neck through the long yellow hair.

"There was a night Mary, once, long ago, a spring night..."

"Four years ago," Mary whispered. "I always remember, Chid."

"So do I, Mary. Always. I said some things then, Mary."

"I did too, Chid," she said quietly. "It has never been any different for me."

"It is different, I reckon, Mary. We've grown up. You're a woman. I've sort of got the right—now—if you still want to remember, Mary."

"I do, Chid. Oh, Chid, it's been so long; you've been so far away, doing man things.... Chid!"

She turned her face to him, soft in the night, the stars in her hair. He held her tight, drew her very close. "I want to kiss you, Mary. I want to..."

"Yes, Chid, I want you to. I want to be in your arms, close to you. Forever, Chid, as I've dreamed."

"As we've dreamed, Mary."

"Yes. Chid, kiss me."

He could feel the strong trembling of her, the soft warm challenge of her lips, the yield of her as their lips met.

"Forever, Chid."

"Forever, my darling. I'll love you forever and ever, my Mary."

They lingered in the sweetness of it, whispering it again and again, entwined in eager embrace, thrilling to the magic of the full rich love which was at last theirs.

He heard the bell of the *Salina* ring out the passing hours. The Great Dipper wheeled silently in the sky. They did not talk much. In an hour he would be winging down the lake, going back to harshness, to war. This enchanted evening would be over; only its memory and promise would remain to drive him on so that there would be for them a long and safe and happy life, a life of endless enchanted evenings when their lips would meet and not be drawn apart.

"I reckon about August," Chid said, "things will be settled by then, my things, the war. I'll come for you, Mary."

"It doesn't matter when, Chid dear, we said forever."

"Forever, Mary. I'll love you, forever and ever."

They returned slowly to the city, arms entwined, sometimes stopping to kiss. They said good-by at the Niagara Hotel.

Dan Dobbins cast off his hawsers at the eighth stroke of the forecastle bell. Chid, almost too late, jumped the widening span between the ship and the dock, throwing his bundle before him. It bounced on the rail and burst open. Mary's blue dress lay on the deck, and a white petticoat lay beside it.

Dan Dobbins and the quartermaster guffawed, holding their bellies, driving Chid below with the hastily picked up garments. But Chid could see nothing funny in the mishap. It was as if, touching her garments, he again felt the intimate warmth of Mary, the beat of her heart against his breast, the smell of her hair, the trembling surrender of her lips. . . .

Chapter Eighteen

CHID WAS ON the road to the Donation District and his timber tract by seven o'clock. It was Sunday, the first workless Sabbath to be declared since the commencement of the building of the fleet. The Navy carpenter rates had the vessels well in hand; Chid's service now was mainly in supervising their labor. The apprentices ran from ship to ship, finishing up the last of the details. They were staving the inboard side of the bulwark rails with live oak, giving real protection to the gunners. The *Porcupine* had lost an entire gun crew in one of the numerous brushes with the British patrol because of inadequate armor of her bulwarks. It would not happen again.

Moses had declared the Niagara ships ready for the lake and returned, with Mary and the Commodore's sister, to Sackett's Harbor. Word had come that the Ontario forces were actually moving, sweeping westward on the lake toward Fort George. The two new brigs lay at the fitting-out mole inside the bar, their sparring growing daily. A man could begin to understand them now, see for himself their formidable grimness, their purpose.

Chid heard the bell of the Catholic Mission in Erie toll the mass. He walked rapidly. He still had that headache, that annoying tiredness. Mrs. Baxter's short note had said that the water mill was operating, reminded him that the cutting of the trees depended upon him. He paid his copper at the tollhouse.

"I reckon," Chid said, answering the tollgate keeper's question, "Perry can be over the bar and into the lake in two weeks. A man might count on this country being safe pretty quick after that."

"How," Mr. Brown asked, sucking on a gourd pipe, "can the captain reach way inter Canady with his guns, Mr. Alwyn? Some on us been

ponderin' on that. Seems if the gov'mint's expectin' an all-fired miracle from them few vessels."

"Why, the fleet's but one of the horses of the team, Mr. Brown. If Perry whups the British fleet, it cuts off the supply lines from the sea to the Crown army. Then Harrison moves against them, by the lake, guarded by Perry. The British'll have to quit. They wouldn't last a week without supplies. The Detroit army'd have to give up for the same reason. The Ontario fleet'll make the same move there at the same time. The whole frontier would be saved. There'd be an end, complete, to this invasion worry."

"It 'pears to me it's win or lose; draw don't count."

"Right. Draw don't count. It's lick 'em or be licked, Mr. Brown. But we ain't planning to be licked. Azial Baxter's brought near all the naval stores in now. And as soon as Chauncey makes the attack on the Niagara forts, I guess we'll have plenty of men."

"I hear they's plenty still sick."

"Plenty, Mr. Brown. I'd guess about a third of the crews we got so far are down."

The gatekeeper studied Chid for a moment. A chipmunk searched unafraid in the butternut shucks that Mr. Brown had been cracking on a hardwood block. "I been hearin' o' rumors, Mr. Alwyn."

"Rumors about what?"

"That the Erie country's a-goin' to be sacrificed to save York State. How else kin you explain all the lollygobbin' that's been a-goin' on? . . . delayed everythin', damned poor food, an' not much o' it, not a decent number o' fightin' men to man even one ship? The hull sity-ation stinks to the summit o' heaven o' lollygobbin'. You an' some others can talk big. But word's about all through the settlement it's high time to get out. Everybody knows that if the British choose to attack right now, they'd just have a picnic o' it. They'd light on the beach, pretty's a lady step-in' outen a swan boat, an' they'd walk onto your fleet like they was goin' to church, not a bother to hinder 'em."

"We'd fight," Chid said stubbornly.

"What with? Guns without shot? Ships without crews? Why, Great Jehovah, Mr. Alwyn, you still got to get your boats inter the lake proper.

Us what know this land ain't 'tall certain you can do that even—the lake's droppin' steady."

"I wouldn't worry, was I you," Chid said shortly.

"Well, I ain't a-goin' to no more. I'm goin' down-country till I see what happens."

Chid got away from the tollhouse quickly, sick of the unpleasant arguments. He had heard them all before. But they had never depressed him as Brown's talk did today. His head ached horribly. He felt a chill loneliness, as if the departure of the shipwrights and the absence of the main naval forces were in a way desertions.

He met the first team of Azial Baxter's train on the road near the Lytle farm. The Pennsylvania Brigade had disbanded. The four-month enlistments were up, and the soldiers, weary of dusty drilling and short rations, had struggled home. The train had no guns this time, but was heavily laden with round and bar shot and, at last, several tons of kegged black powder.

"Show 'em," he told the lead driver, "to every man you see. Make 'em count the items you got. When you get to the tollgate, make Brown lick the shot."

"You sportin', Mr. Alwyn?"

"Nope."

"By God, you sound teched, Mr. Alwyn. You all right?"

"A-yep. Go on now. Do as I say."

"Damned if I will, sir. Azial alone'll give me orders. Lick the shot! God in the mountains, that's a crazy notion!"

Chid tramped on to the Baxter land. The house was empty, but he followed a new well-worn path over a rolling intervale and came out at the sawmill site. The rig was a Duquesne piston saw, with a wooden beam, belted to the oak overshot water wheel which turned slowly under the fall of clear spring water from the new sluiceway.

Mrs. Baxter, in denim pants and a sunbonnet, superintended the mill. She offered Chid spring-cooled ginger beer, then introduced him to the foreman.

"This is Mr. Tarnip; Mr. Alwyn."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Alwyn. Bugle Tarnip's the name, jes' Bugle, you like. Do we get at that lesson, Mr. Alwyn?"

"Come on."

Chid's land was good. The trees were not crowded. They had grown tall and straight, in the lee of a gentle hill which divided the twisting north wind. Bugle Tarnip was a good logger, an Adirondak man, sixteen years in the Pennsylvania forests, and he learned well. They reached the turnpike boundary late in the afternoon.

"Mrs. Baxter, she allows to cut for ship timber first; then salvage for houseboards and such. Is that agreeable?"

"A-yep. But carry the ship timber down to Pittsburgh first, that's the present high market. What's she paying you, Mr. Tarnip?"

"Eighteen a month, plus keep. Have a drink?"

"A big one. I kind of feel rotten all over." Chid drank the fiery whisky, hardly feeling its flame. He felt hot inside, not only from the potent liquor but as if from a fire kindled deep in his belly. His head throbbed.

Bugle Tarnip laughed. "I guess you ain't over that Erie farewell party total, hey? Them affairs got a way o' hangin' onto a man for weeks."

"That's it. It was one hell of a toot, Bugle. I got to get on."

Chid could not recollect the return journey. He shucked his shirt, walking along the hot dusty road toward Erie, grateful for the beat of the warm sunshine. But hot and sweating, he would suddenly feel a clammy coldness creep over him and hastily put the shirt on again. Some place along the road, past the Baxter clearing, a three-oxen team and a wagon overtook him, going downhill.

"Chid! Hell to Betsy, it's good to see you, Chid."

It was Azial Baxter, bound to Erie from the ark landing with the last of the powder and shot. He drew up at the foot of the hill and invited Chid to climb to the box.

"Chid, this was a fust-rate trip. Light stuff, mostly, lighter'n cannons, anyway, 'twas, an' the boys made swift time. Mrs. cal'ates we make seventy dollars this week. Ain't that a caution o' money for six days' work? Dang it, we're never goin' to get shut o' bein' obliged to you, Chid. We ain't; an' that's gospel! I jes' see Mrs. when I passed our place an' Bugle Tarnip reported he's onto yer marked trees an' fellin' 'em rapid."

"Who's Bugle Tarnip?"

"Shucks, Chid! You jes' met o' him. He's doin' the loggin' off fer us. Tarnation, Chid, you jes' learned him."

"I recollect," Chid mumbled. His insides seemed to be burning. His whole body ached and throbbed with a withering pain.

"Four more trips an' we'll have the gov'mint stuff all hauled. You got to lay up the arks before you tote much timber, Chid. They need seam-pluggin' here an' yon, an' the groundin' strakes must be rubbed complete off'n 'em. Chid, you stand to make a hell of a purse o' money on our deal. Me an' Mrs. is glad fer you. We don't begrudge—Chid!"

Chid had hung over the side of the wagon and vomited. Azial's great arm reached out, sliding under his shoulders for support. Chid was white. He slumped against Azial, struggling close to the body warmth of the huge man, chilled again to shivering.

"Hell to Betsy!" Azial muttered in amazement. "An' I never smelled the likkor till this minute. Boy, I thought you was behavin' odd. Giddap!" he clucked to the lumbering oxen. "Git on, you lazy cre'turs, you. I got to get Chid to Erie afore he ruint's hisself with his hull future."

"Take me to Stone's," Chid said weakly.

"The hell I will, Chid. You had enough likkor."

He laid Chid in the box on a blanket pad spread over the kegged powder. He reckoned Chid was horribly drunk; the reek of powerful liquor was heavy about him. Azial reached Erie at dusk. He cut around the settlement and drove straight to the Cascade shanty office. Nobody answered his knock. After a cautious peering into the sash and the dusk shadows about, he timidly opened the door. Then he carried Chid in from the wagon and laid him, with a shy tenderness, on the hard bunk.

"You'll be sober come mornin', boy," Azial whispered softly. "Dang it, I wisht Mrs. was to hand; this ain't my line. There you be, Chid. I hope sincere you won't get in no trouble over this."

Azial drove his outfit to the unloading platform of the brick magazine of the naval stores yard on the shore, and late that night reached his own fireside. In the morning he was off again by ark to Pittsburgh.

Neither Azial nor Chid had seen the letter which lay, unopened, upon the board table. It was dirty and pawed, and the handwriting labored, as if written under a sputtering candle by a person unaccustomed to handling a quill.

Dear Mister Alwyn [the letter read]. I write to lett you know what Moses Leet hollered afore he was took off. He hollered Lett Chidsy

Alwyn know for godds sake. We was fellen trees in the woods astern Sackett's then. Mary was along with us pickin berry and Moses he was tallyin and thar they war. They was British marines and Indians. I am shot. They skipped me but I am not ded and I hear Moses Leet. They went away on a yawlboat and Mister Sears the bosun sez they are tooken to detroit to work on the British vessels. I do not know. Thar was 6 on them and Mary. She was not capchered. But she went on count Moses is week and is like to get sick agin. They went acrost Ontario like to the west. I bare yu no illwill Mister Alwyn, I recond you and Mister Nott was on the *Blessed Cause* schunner. Moses he swore me not to tell and I am not that kind. yur friend Livy Bracket.

Mr. Knell, the blacksmith, who had been put on the Navy pay roll to make up the great variety of gun-carriage iron needed for the brigs, found Chid in the office about noon the following day. He took one look at him, and sent his striker for Dr. Parsons. By daylight no one could mistake Chid's trouble. The surgeon had Chid carried to the pest chambers over the Erie Hotel taproom within the hour. Chid was desperately sick and unconscious when Mr. Knell and his striker carried him up the three flights of narrow box stairs to the pest chamber. Dr. Parsons, shucking his gold-braided uniform jacket, prepared for a long siege. He had seen over two hundred cases in the last months, and no two were exact in symptoms or reaction to treatment. But he recognized Chid's case as critical as he called for emetics and purgatives, his first attack always.

"Has the lad been working in the lake rot, Mr. Knell?"

"Dunno, sir." Mr. Knell touched his forelock respectfully with a charcoal pocked hand. "Ordinary, no, sir. He's on the hull. He goes inter the woods sometimes though, sir."

"Yistady morning," the striker offered timidly, "I see Mr. Alwyn fair up to his gut in the lake. Fixin' the brig rudder chains, he was, sir."

"Hah! Now, we're getting a history. He inhaled, likely. Yes; yes. He laid all night alone with no care. He tried to dose himself with spirits. That's it, Mr. Knell. We've got a serious case here. Can you men help? The cure will have to be drastic. I hate it as much as an amputation."

Dr. Parsons called for hot water in the yard barrel. While it was being heated by Mr. Stone's redemptioner, the doctor undressed Chid

and wrapped him in a blanket. He then melted a cake of beeswax and plugged Chid's ears and nostrils. Mr. Knell carried him, like a sack of grain, to the barrel of hot water.

"Ordinarily I'd prescribe three and three," the doctor said, his brow furrowed. "H'm... swamp and lake fumes both; a nasty combination indeed. Make it five and five, Mr. Knell. The cold first, please."

Mr. Knell and the striker plunged Chid into the cold-water barrel, submerging him until he could barely breathe. Dr. Parsons, reaching into the slimy, previously used water, reached for Chid's pulse. It was a professional gesture, of little value, and in a weary, helpless way the doctor knew it. "Very well," he said after two minutes had passed, "now the hot, men. Handsome, please."

Chid was soused into the barrel of hot water; then again into the cold. At the seventh plunge Dr. Parsons stopped it. There was almost no pulse. He shook his head and ordered Chid again to the bed in the pest chamber.

"I dare not do more," Parsons muttered as if arguing with himself. "To let blood now would finish the boy. I wish to God man was vouchsafed the same knowledge of medicine that he is of war."

"Can I do anythin' more, sir?" Mr. Knell whispered.

"Yes," the doctor said quietly. "While you're forging your goddamn' guns, you can pray for Mr. Alwyn."

The form of the lake fever which Chid had contracted was known as intermittent fever, the most dreaded of the several forms which the plague took. It was severe and dangerous always, but, as its virulence grew less intense with the passage of time, the disease staggered its attack, alternating the days. One day its effect was mild, lulling the victim into a sense of returning health; then, on the following day, it rallied and attacked with all its symptoms of extreme chills and fever and terrible delirium. But it was many weeks before the malady definitely proved itself of the intermittent type.

Chid was taken by the lake fever on the twenty-fifth of May. He had no recollection at all of time until mid-June. One day he awoke from a black dreamless sleep, near nightfall, with the sound of guns booming in his ears. At first the reports only pounded on his brain with meaningless dull thuds superimposed upon the constant throbbing of his head.

He lay on a single rope-webbed cot on a shuck-filled mattress in a small garret room. Alongside was another cot, empty. A painted tin coach trunk stood on the floor, beneath a window which gave a view of the expanse of Presque Isle and the great lake beyond. The room was stifling hot, but Chid's one sensation, as he opened his eyes to rationality for the first time in more than three weeks, was one of bitter damp chill. He shivered with it, unable to control himself, and with an effort that took all his strength pulled the quilt tightly into his neck. His exertions rang a small brass bell which had been fastened to the bed ropes. He heard its tinkle, like a far-off waterfall, without interest. Only the thud of the guns pounded upon his dulled senses, and he cried out against the pain of listening to them.

Mrs. Baxter came cautiously into the room. She bustled about Chid, making him comfortable, her sharp alert eyes worried.

"Be still, dearie," Mrs. Baxter whispered softly. "Guns will always rouse you men. There now, 'tis nothing. Go to sleep, Mr. Alwyn. When the doctor comes, he'll say what's to do next. You ain't stirred so much since Azial found you were here. If the doctor'd only stop lettin' your blood, dearie, I swear I'd have you rational in no time. But I s'pose he knows best. Now sleep, Mr. Alwyn."

Mrs. Baxter stole softly out of the room. The guns still boomed. Sometimes with the sharpest of the reports the glass sash in the room rattled, and against the panes there darted from time to time reflection of thin red tongues of flame.

Chid was not to know that day that what he was hearing was the final action in the campaign against Fort George. Winging up the Erie shore on the freshening night wind, their quartermasters searching anxiously for the Presque Isle bar ranges, were the five warships which had been bottled in the Niagara. Behind them, spitting angrily from bow chasers, pounded the British fleet.

Chauncey and Lewis's army several weeks ago had cleared the Niagara region of the British in a fierce bloody attack on Fort George, the key stronghold. Fort Erie, as the British had retreated to Queenland, had been evacuated. The whole Niagara frontier was in the possession of the Americans; the enemy line of supply and communication to Detroit had been driven far to the north, into the remote wildernesses of Canada.

If it could now be severed, at the water link through Lake Erie, the offensive would be placed in the hands of the waiting western army of Harrison, and the vast Michigan lands, the valley of the Mississippi, indeed the continent to the Spanish states and the Pacific, would be preserved for the Union. More than ever before, the responsibility for success rested upon Captain Perry and his still-unready fleet.

The task of getting the freed ships into the lake had been no easy one. For two weeks Perry and his inadequate naval crews and growling hired teamsters had warped the vessels through the swift racing currents of the Niagara River. Only four days ago the squadron had finally assembled in the lake and, buffeted by head winds and heavy seas, commenced the tedious beat along the south shore of Erie. Until dusk this very night the Captain had eluded the British squadron which was searching for him.

The enemy was in his wake now, close-hauled on the full breeze which swept from the watery west. The racing squadrons plunged onward through the last of the daylight. The bar of Presque Isle was the goal. Inside the bay Perry's new squadron would be safe.

The watchers on Erie shore that night could only guess as to the progress of the desperate race. The staggered gunfire and the sudden tiny blazes of red in the darkness might be from either fleet. The cannonading drew nearer, until it was suddenly echoing against the shore buildings and the steep clay banks of the lake shore. It filled some hearts with pride and with sudden belated resolution, and some it filled with fear and dismay. Already the laden wagons were again creaking south along the Waterford Turnpike on which Mr. Brown had not collected toll for two weeks, piled high with household goods and with children, the stock pacing the tailboards with anxious looks back at Erie.

Mrs. Baxter, bathing Chid with vinegar as she had just been instructed by Dr. Parsons, kept her eyes glued to the window. In the large main pest chamber adjoining, those patients who could filled the window openings, the Navy men sniffing the night like hound-dogs for the whiff of powder and damning their luck to be beached at such a time. Behind them the surgeon's mates packed handbags and medicines. If the British succeeded in closing with Perry and followed him through the channel, the ranges of which his course would reveal, the order stood to evacuate. Wagons and hitched horses, their ears laid back against the gunfire, waited before

Mr. Stone's taproom. The drivers, this night, did not congregate in the bar but remained soberly upon the boxes.

"Alwyn," Dr. Parsons pronounced, shaking his head sadly, "can't be moved, Mrs. Baxter. No matter what, he'll have to remain here."

"Alone?"

"Of course alone, ma'am. I'll leave written instructions to the British surgeon should it be necessary."

"It won't be necessary, sir," Mrs. Baxter replied with an odd choke in her voice. "I reckon I wouldn't leave him."

"No," the doctor said, "I reckon you wouldn't. You've been more than a mother to him, Mrs. Baxter. Are you related?"

"No, sir. He's just a good man. He's kept his word with my husband and me, and he's treated us fair and honest. It's more than we've ever had before. We're the kind that value it, sir. It's why I came when I heard he was sick."

"I'd say," Parsons said quietly, "you rather deserve whatever good fortune Alwyn has brought you. Good night, ma'am."

Added to the gunfire now there was the ragged crack of musket shots. To the watching Navy men, it meant that the ships were within range of marine fire from the tops. Perry would have to slide inside the harbor or turn and give battle in minutes. The flashes now, and the close, space-filling booming of the long guns, were almost abreast of the town.

There came suddenly a cheer from the windows of the pest chamber. Off on the black lake the red flashes stabbed the night now like a dense swarm of fireflies. The pursued squadron had crossed the bar, quickly spread fanwise, and rounded to. Perry's five ships now lay with luffing sails in the calm bay pouring broadside after broadside into the surprised enemy. Hastily the British ships killed their way to avoid stranding. As they came about, they received the full weight of Perry's careful fire into their exposed topsides. Realizing the trap, they quickly scudded off before the wind under hastily organized return fire, presenting only their sterns to the defenders; and as they did so, running parallel with the shore and the peninsula, the shore batteries opened a rapid murderous long-gun fire and made the rout complete.

"Mr. Alwyn," Mrs. Baxter whispered softly, "I reckon we won't be alone."

Chid's sleep became untroubled and quiet. There was no longer that awful pounding, that terrific paining sound as if guns were firing. He felt cool now, not chilled.

He awoke in the early morning with a clear awareness that was satisfyingly fresh and strange. His vision focused on the bay beyond the window. It sparkled bright and living under a gentle, crisp, north wind; and under the high shore, swinging to taut chain cables, were not five but ten ships; and from the main gaff of each flew the American ensign.

He felt light and spirited, like getting up. His mind was clear and sharp and suddenly filled with the recollection of his affairs. He had choppers in the woods and a mill sawing busily. Azial Baxter would be hauling stores on the arks which he owned. Mr. Brown would be expecting him to be on one of the ships; many shot racks were still unmade, and Dr. Parsons had requisitioned for a large oaken table with leather straps to be through-bolted to the deck in the center of the cockpit floor of each brig. He had, somehow, to burn a late candle and write to Mary, to make their plans for meeting, when his apprenticeship was ended. And, while his hand was in it, to accept the offer of Ballston & Adams, the timber agents in Pittsburgh, to handle the shipment of choice air-seasoned ship timber due to leave Waterford on his own arks about August the first. There was a matter to be taken care of on the coast, too, an ancient danger that he had grown to be forgetful of but which, in his heart, he knew would always threaten the liberty which would be his when he became at last a freeman and ruled over that prosperous dream-shipyard up the bay.

Without willing it, he struggled to get from his bed. The bell tinkled on the bed rope under him. Mrs. Baxter, looking sleepy, opened the door.

"Ma'am," Chid said. "Ma'am, I want to get up."

"No," Mrs. Baxter whispered. "This is fine, Mr. Alwyn, fine; but it's your good day, like the doctor said. Tomorrow you'll be down again. Mr. Alwyn, do be still, please—you've a neighbor now. He's a very sick man."

Chid turned his head slowly to the other bed. Wrapped in quilts to the throat, the perspiration trickling in shiny beads from his pale wan face, was Captain Perry.

Chapter Nineteen

ON HIS GOOD days Chid never tired of resting back against his straw pillow and watching the fleet at battle practice. It consisted now of three brigs and seven schooners. Its tonnage and weight of broadside metal almost matched the British fleet, even including the new *Detroit*, which was being rushed to completion by forced captive labor.

He liked to watch the sham battles. Each day three or four of the schooners slipped their cables and, spreading their white wings, maneuvered about the bay in sail-handling drill.

They fought innumerable battles for position with each other, each trying always for the weather gauge. When any two got within range of each other, sheets would be let fly; they would stand up into the wind, the bulwark ports lift ominously, and through them appear the black muzzles of the guns. The guns were never fired. Powder was too scarce for that. But the gun captain would blow a whistle, its sound reaching Chid like the silvery muted call of a bay bird's, now that his window was permitted to remain open; and the crews, accepting it as the touch of the match, would run the piece in handsomely, sponge, reload, and have it run out, waiting for the whistle, in less than a minute.

Sometimes the schooners would signal by flag hoist to the watchtower on the peninsula, and if no enemy sail was on the horizon, which was not often, move into the broad lake itself for the maneuvers. Chid noticed that even they with their light draught did not cross the bar any more. They worked carefully through the winding channel, searching for that one deep, safe path. The lake had dropped fearfully. On a calm noon day, from his window, Chid could plainly see the shadows of the ships on the sandy bottom. As they moved under the light summer winds, the vessels were followed always by this shadow, like a shark trailing

them in the cool depths. Lately, some of the bar itself was visible, a yellow ribband creeping almost awash from the mainland to the cape of the peninsula, broken only at one place by the deep green of safe water.

Often, when the vessels practiced on the lake, the watch gun on the cape would bellow, and, like ducks alarmed by the hunter's musket, the fleet would tack smartly and race for the protection of the bay. Then the play would cease. The yawl boats and punts which hung always astern of the three brigs would fill with the crews which had been fitting out; they would pass swiftly to the schooners, and Chid would hear the harsh scream of the battle rattle as general quarters were taken in earnest. Without anything having been changed, the schooners would suddenly become grim and lethal, and slither to their stations in support of the shore batteries.

But the British never closed for a real attack. They seemed to be reconnoitering, to be watching the progress of the shipbuilding, and remained always out of gun range. Once, when the British observation force numbered only two small schooners, Chid's own *Ariel* broke from the formation like an impatient child and gave spirited chase. She sailed deep into the afternoon sun, spitting fire from under the press of white canvas, and when she returned at dusk it was with ragged shot holes in her bulwarks and her bowsprit splintered. The *Ariel*, Mrs. Baxter reported jubilantly when she came to settle him that night, had shot the foremast out of one of the Britishers and smashed the stern battery of the other, but, darting in for the kill, had discovered two of the heavy ships of the enemy standing toward her, and had run for cover.

Chid took the doughty little *Ariel's* attack as a personal triumph. She was to him a living thing, created from nothing but an idea and hard work and his own pride in his trade. He could pick her out from the fleet at any time. There was a jaunty rake to her masts, a smooth even sheen to her black topsides that bespoke perfect workmanship in the frame and plank beneath. He felt about her, he guessed, as Captain Perry felt about the number two brig. Number two, he told Chid, for no real reason save that he somehow had faith in her, was to be his flagship. He had asked permission from the Navy Department to name her *Lawrence* in honor of his old friend, Captain James Lawrence, who was

now roving the North Atlantic in command of the great frigate-of-the-line *Chesapeake*.

Perry's attack of the fever was light, and he was on the mend long before Chid. Dr. Parsons believed his collapse due mainly to over-exertion on behalf of the fleet. But, nevertheless, he confined him to his bed.

The room had become Perry's office. Document-littered tables surrounded his bed, and his brass-bound rosewood writing case was always near at hand. The papers and books and letters became untidy piles about him, overflowing onto the one chair reserved for the visitors who must see him. Noah Brown, who could navigate slowly now with the aid of a stout hickory cane, came frequently. He had delayed his departure for Lake Champlain, where he was to build some vitally important naval ships, and undertaken the completion of the brigs for the captain.

For both sides the race was one of completing the fighting ships. Neither dared risk a decisive engagement until the fleets were matched, and up until now it had been a contest of shipbuilders. But there was no more time for new building. Summer was passing. The British had a huge army in Detroit, and the Americans had one equally large to the south of them. Whichever side could first destroy the opposition's supply and communications lines would gain the offensive and carry the war into the other's territory and to victory.

Lieutenant Elliot, who was second in command of the fleet and commander of the brig which had been named the *Niagara*, was a frequent visitor. To him Perry had assigned the task of training the crews. Elliot was a defeatist. In spite of a brilliant record, which included the original organization of the Black Rock navy yard and the capture of the *Caledonia* from the British, Elliot regarded every measure of preparation for the coming battle for the lake as hopeless.

"We have so far," Elliot remarked heavily one day in Chid's hearing, "three hundred and ten seamen, sir; only enough to man the schooners."

"We have a civil reserve, lieutenant. You must remember it."

"I do, sir. No man ever could forget that rabble. They—they are worthless."

"No man is worthless," Perry said softly. "You forget, lieutenant, that

every man has a heart. All we can do is to train and train. The smell of powder and the scream of a ball does wonders for courage and will."

"Lieutenant Packett of the *Ariel* has enlisted forty-two men for the Naval Brigade, sir," Elliot said stiffly, "mostly from hereabouts."

"Excellent," the captain smiled; "now send him east, Elliot, to Black Rock and Geneva and Utica. Commodore Chauncey can't have taken every last man. We need eight hundred men; but, damn it, with the ships so nearly complete and the British spoiling so for a fight, I'll engage with half that number."

The problems of Perry and his cheerful, hopeful attack upon them amazed Chid. He suffered with the characteristic attacks of nausea and body ache during this time when the parade of naval officers and civilians and Army men and Indian chiefs filed by his sick bed. But, in some inexplicable manner, the man's mind rose above the mortifications of his sick, exhausted body, and he met every problem with clear understanding and sharp, shrewd solution. He was worried about only one thing, and when Chid was sitting and opportunity afforded, Perry would sometimes discuss it with him.

It was the lake level. He watched it like a hawk. Real Taylor had brought a telescope from Perry's sea chest in the rude after-cabin under the flagship's quarterdeck, and he anxiously studied the slowly widening shore many times each day.

"Captain Dobbins," Perry said once, talking more to himself than to Chid, "reports that the main channel is less than ten feet deep, much lower than is usual at this time of the year. But I've noticed that the lake rises after a period of northerly winds. Now, Chid, I presume that we can unburden enough to clear."

"To seven feet," Chid said. "Less, and you'd run the risk of capsizing."

"The brigs will need eight feet at least then. I'm praying desperately that we'll have that much depth and a north wind when we're ready to cross the bar."

"The ships are almost ready, sir."

"Aye, the ships are, Chid. It's we who are not. I begged Commodore Chauncey to spare me sufficient men to go out and meet the enemy. If we had the man-power, I swear, I'd cross within the week."

"Cross and anchor behind the schooners, sir."

"It's a risky chance, I'm afraid. We've got to enter the lake fighting. The minute we make the first move, there will be signal smoke behind us to bring the British. The fight will be in sight of Erie, I believe."

"And the chances, sir?"

The captain studied the distances for a long moment before answering. "Good for victory," he said finally. "We match the enemy almost exactly. But we have something which the British do not have, Chid; something that, in the last analysis, wins battles and wars. Our men fight for their homes and their dear ones; for their lives and freedom and liberty. Our enemies fight they know not why; for obscure reasons beyond even their commanders. It's the essential difference between us. It's the intangible that brings victory in spite of—"

"Chauncey and Congress, official stupidity and greed."

"It would be unworthy of me to say it, Chid," Perry said shortly, and fell silent.

But Chid knew that he worried always about the lake. He himself took to watching its level anxiously. Unless the fleet was manned and trained at once, it was liable to find itself landlocked within Presque Isle bay until the next spring. The whole effort would then have been useless; the whole frontier would again fall to the British, and, strengthened and freshened, the enemy would the next time make good their threat of invasion and division.

Chid tried not to think what such a calamity would mean to his own plans. On these days when he felt strong and eager and, as Azial who had come to visit him once had put it, "settin' on ginger," he managed his own affairs through Mrs. Baxter.

She was utterly capable and more than willing to become Chid's physical self. Azial and Chid, reckoning future profits, had spared the price of a horse for her. This nag Mrs. Baxter rode wherever the mill business required that she go.

The Pittsburgh agents waited anxiously for the shipments of timber. A Captain Shreve planned to build some new-type steamboats on the river, and was demanding timber of a specification and growth that could not be supplied from any of the western valleys. Naval agents were in Pittsburgh, too, ready to outbid both Shreve and his competitor, Robert Fulton, on ship timber, and cart it to the coast at their own expense.

Azial, not understanding the full import of the gossip he had heard to the south, told these things to Chid.

Listening to Mrs. Baxter's careful, detailed reports, he could visualize the great stock of sawn timber seasoning beside the mill. Within a week, Chid estimated one day, studying the measurements of the arks, Azial could commence hauling the bulky straight-grained keel and stringer oak to Waterford in preparation for the first loading.

He always felt good after a talk with Mrs. Baxter. She cared for Chid as a mother would have, with a tenderness and concern that often, as she covered him or brought his food, showed in her sharp, intelligent eyes. It was at these times, or when the captain talked with his many visitors, that she discussed the hauling and mill problems in a low voice with Chid.

But these things were all on Chid's good days. After each one, during the night, would come again the dreadful chills and fevers, and all the next day he would toss and writhe in the throes of the terrific headaches and the searing muscular pains. Toward evening the attack would wear off and, weak and exhausted, he would find good dreamless sleep at last. The next morning he would be without pain and eager to return to the managing of his affairs again. And always, on those bright mornings, he wanted to get up, to go forth and personally wage his war against time. For, like the captain, he worried about water levels. Early August was positively the latest at which the arks could thread the pools and rapids of the river to the timber markets.

"You just squeezed through, Alwyn," Dr. Parsons would reply to his eternal requests to be dismissed; "just, my boy. It was out of my hands. Providence, I reckon, lad, isn't through with you yet. Ask me tomorrow, my boy."

Chid would grin wryly. Tomorrow was always the bad day. He wouldn't even feel like asking.

The sentry boat pulled smartly along the edge of the bay. A Master Marine sat in the stern sheets sourly regarding the shore line. He ought to land at the Cascade yard. He had not checked the desolate place in weeks.

"Hold your water, bosun. I'll have a look ashore."

Bosun O'Leary stood up beside the marine and eased the tiller yoke lanyard, heading the boat for the beach.

"Oars!"

The rowing ceased, oars idle athwartships.

"Way enough! Handsome does it, laddy-mates!"

Six oars were tossed as one. The boat drifted, losing way, to the muddy shingle. The Master Marine sighed and looked at his boots. They were newly blacked, gleaming like obsidian marble. Mr. Denny, the saddler in Erie, had just tapped them; charged a whole dollar because the war had made oak-tanned leather as scarce as Quakers in the militia. One wetting and they'd hurt like sin—and he knew from experience that O'Leary, for all his snappy seamanship, would contrive to handle the boat so as to get his boots wet. That ancient battle between the Navy and the Marines had not ceased because of a mere war between nations.

"Bowmen, stand by to point oars!"

"Go over by the brow, sir, all ready, sir," O'Leary said stiffly to the Master Marine and saluted.

Here it was, thought the Master Marine—oars neatly pointed, a gentle pressure on them, and the boat would slide from under him as he stepped to the beach. O'Leary, damn him, wouldn't have to give an order or overlook a positive action. Any Navy youngster, messboy to midshipman, would know how to do it, and would they do it!

"I've decided not to land, bosun," the Master Marine said with dignity. "I can see from here."

"As you say, sir," O'Leary murmured, his victory bold in his laughing eyes. "Out oars, my hearties!"

The Master Marine flitted his eyes over the old Cascade yard. A few piles of slash, a weed-grown set of launching ways, an empty unpainted storehouse or two, the board shanty that the foreman used to bunk in, a heaped mound that covered the common British grave since that raid long ago—Christ, what a dismal place!

"You may proceed, bosun."

"Aye, aye, sir. Give way together, lads. Hup—two, hup—four! Them's prime slick boots you got there, sir, if I may say so."

"Mind your damn' boat and shut up!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

The boat passed along the shore of the bay, the wake bubbling, chuckling, almost laughing. . . .

And so the letter from Livy Bracket remained undiscovered where the runner had placed it on the board table of the shanty, propped against the half-model of the *Ariel* so that Chidsy Alwyn would surely find it.

Mrs. Baxter sat in the guest chair. The captain's bed was unoccupied. But spread upon it was a large square flag of blue bunting. Upon it Mrs. Baxter was sewing white letters. She worked nimbly and with concentration. Chid slept gently on his bed near the window. It was his good day. All the days, lately, seemed good. Even those days of pain and ache were not so exhausting now, and Chid had several times walked unaided into the general ward to visit with the other patients. The fever was leaving him with characteristic rapidity, and this morning Dr. Parsons had mentioned with satisfaction that his days in the infirmary were numbered.

Chid stirred, watching Azial's wife at her work. She had been good to him, to him and to his dreams; like an extra pair of hands and feet. "Ma'am," Chid said sleepily, "ma'am, what are you doing?"

"It's a battle flag for Captain Perry, Mr. Alwyn." She held the flag for Chid to see. "'Don't Give Up the Ship,' it says. See. They were the last words of his friend, Captain Lawrence, when he was killed on the *Chesapeake* last month. The news upset Cap'n Perry no end. They were midshipmen together long ago. The Captain got permission to name his ship *Lawrence* by the same post that he got the dreadful news. He got up that afternoon, Mr. Alwyn; against Dr. Parson's orders. It's the first time I ever saw him mad. 'I'll get up no matter what you say. There's work to be done,' the cap'n said. 'You'll not, sir,' says the doctor. 'I'll not permit it.' That's when the cap'n got mad, like I say. 'You forget,' Cap'n Perry said, 'that I am your superior officer. Have my clothes made ready, Dr. Parsons, please.' He was on his ship an hour later."

"Is he well, really well?"

"I don't know. He was still terribly weak. But I do believe his spirit will keep him on his feet."

"I reckon," Chid agreed. "Ma'am, has Azial hauled the arks out yet?"

"Yes, he did. They're all four on the bank of the Le Boeuf, near to

the turnpike, so's you can get the material to them for repairing up. Last week's cutting beats all, Mr. Alwyn."

"Good, ma'am. Someday I want to make all this right with you and Azial; I mean what you both have done for me while I've been sick."

"There's nothing to be made right. I guess without you, sick or well, Mr. Alwyn, Azial and me'd still be dubbing along like always. Azial's having a new suit made down to Pittsburgh. It's his first since Lord knows when. He's a loving man, Mr. Alwyn; he wouldn't order it till I promised to have me a dress made."

Chid grinned. The late afternoon shadows crept from the forests, mellowing the raw scars of roads and clearings about the settlement. Mrs. Baxter put away her sewing kit.

"Bugle Tarnip says to tell you that he'll have all the stock ready and seasoned by next week," Mrs. Baxter said. "He'll load the arks as soon as they're fixed and launched again. Who is going to repair them, Mr. Alwyn?"

"I reckon I can get to do that myself now, ma'am."

"Good. I expect there's nothing left after that but to deliver and collect in profits. I take it yours'll be consid'erable."

"All I've got, ma'am, every cent to my name, is invested in that timber."

"You'll be the king of your town back home, I suppose. Lord, it must be nice, thinking of going home to a place that's settled and put. I get crazy if I think about this territory too much. First it was the Indians, and now the British. It seems we'll never get settled down to grow and prosper in peace and security like your towns on the coast."

"I'm not going back, ma'am. I reckon to remain right here if the country stays American."

"God bless you, Mr. Alwyn. All this land needs once it's safe is young minds and young muscle. Azial's kind done their work, clearing and building the roads and chasing off the savages. Your kind must come now, to build real things, schools and churches and a county government—and new families, Mr. Alwyn. Though a man will find that difficult; girls ain't bountiful hereabouts."

"I got a girl, ma'am."

"You have? Are you spoke?"

"Yes, ma'am," Chid said blushing. "We're to be married just as soon's things are settled up here. I saw her last month and—told her that I loved her. I knew it for years, ma'am, but now it's real. It used to be just kind of between the words of a letter, but now I can hear it come singing across the wind; I can see it in the sunshine and in the stars."

"Yes," said Mrs. Baxter softly. "Tell me about her, Mr. Alwyn. What's her name?"

"Mary Leet. She's at Sackett's Harbor, though I ain't had a letter for a long time."

Chid told Azial's wife all about Mary, and all about his plans. He felt no need to be cautious or reserved with her. It felt good, terribly good, to talk so, to put all his secret hopes and thoughts and yearnings into actual words.

"She's a sweet girl, seems. I'd admire to be neighbors with your Mary."

"Thank you, ma'am. I guess she's kind of grown to be the best part of my dreams. There wouldn't be much sense to the rest without her. You'll like her, I reckon."

"I'm sure I will. Good night, Mr. Alwyn. I'm not coming any more."

"Good night, Mrs. Baxter. I'll be down to repair up the arks in a few days."

Chid lay for a long while looking idly over the lake. Below him the fleet hung lazily on the green waters. The brigs had joined the schooners at the moorings now. They rested in the sparkling path of the sunset with wings folded, like gulls gathered in some pleasant cove for the night. The sentry boat passed between them, leaving a crisp wedge of ripple. He could hear the hail of the guard and the answering "All's well" from the watchmaster of each vessel. Thin wood smoke ghosted straight up into the warm evening from the brick galley chimneys. From the *Lawrence* Mrs. Baxter's flag suddenly crept to the truck of the mainmast. It brought a lusty cheer from the men who had gathered at the rails, and on the *Ariel* somebody commenced to sing in a deep, strong voice. Out where the dark green swath cut the yellow shallows of the bar, a rowing boat lay like a floating chip upon the bay. From her bow a man sounded with a long staff, plunging it deeply into the waters as the boat moved slowly into the lake.

The sun dropped to the western horizon and hung there for a brief pause as if to give the watchers on the peninsula a last look for an enemy sail; then it abruptly sank into the lake. From the spot then there spread in a wondrous quivering fan all the colors the earth and skies had ever known. They paraded through the heaven and clashed to combine and again divide, a gigantic orchestration of color beyond the hearing or understanding of mortals. Quickly the silent music faded to wilting purples and lavenders and died, with a final burst of somber blood-red, into living velvet-black.

It had been one of those rare pauses in the eternal motion of the universe when men could look away from earth and into the heavens, to draw from the spectacle promise and courage so that life could proceed anew, refreshed and invigorated and hopeful. It was such a moment to Chid. He felt keenly, for those brief minutes, his own insignificance as an individual, and saw himself and all other men as a vast milling swarm, like ants or hiving bees. He could see, within the limits of his comprehension, the united effort of all in forwarding what concerned them all. It was as if all humanity was for the moment merged into one individuality, and that individuality was dedicated to the common, undivided purpose of living decently and cleanly and at peace.

His mood was quickly over. His practical mind, unbidden, fought down and obliterated the strange picture. Nevertheless, the experience left him refreshed and buoyant. He took his supper with relish.

A sober member of the Friends' Society, who served as orderly in the pest house without any compensation except the knowledge of his own faithfulness to his belief and his conscience, came for the pewter dishes.

"Thee dined well, friend," the man said. "Another few days, and thee will be gone from here."

"A-yep. I been waiting on it."

The Quaker smiled. He was a queer, small man in dull black clothing, with a shy smile and light blue eyes and curious pointed hair waves at each temple. Chid thought he looked like the bisque statuette of Pan which used to stand on Aunt Leety's back-parlor whatnot.

"Thee is invited to join in the ward singing this evening," he said,

watching Chid oddly. "Indeed, 'twould be seemly of thee, as thee may learn."

"I might," Chid said.

He had no particular desire to join in the weekly hymn singing, but when he heard the Quaker's pitch pipe in the next room and the strangely lusty singing that followed, he got up and walked slowly into the ward. There were about forty patients there; all naval men, hardy, rough-skinned sailors and ship's boys.

Chid sat away from the window which was open to the night. The Quaker stood in the center of the great garret room under a lantern hanging from the cobwebbed rafters, beating out the measure of the hymn by clapping his hands. The singing, it struck Chid, was extremely loud and spirited tonight, and in the crowded room he detected a tenseness that he could not at first understand.

He waited for a chorus, in which all hands joined, before asking about it. A gnarled ancient seaman sat beside him, trying to be as noisily songful as his mates.

"Not now, matey. One goes," said the old sailor nodding toward the window. "Sing, goddammit!"

Chid sang, still not understanding. A man had gone to the window and, grasping a rope which swayed in the darkness, dropped over the sill, and, hand over hand, disappeared downward. As he watched, another man broke from the ranks and followed.

"We're goin' to join the fleet," the seaman whispered to Chid. "Word's out that Perry's goin' inter the lake tonight. His battle flag's flyin'."

"Why go this way?"

"Hell! We're counted sick men, matey. Some on us is, I guess. But the cap'n's got too damn human, sez I; he wouldn't hear o' lettin' us back to our berths yet. Whose war is this, anyways? It ain't his'n alone, is it? No, sez we, it ain't; not by the pawls o' the capstan, it ain't! So we're goin'."

"All of you?"

"Tom Shad, he ain't; nor mebbe two-three others. They still got the fever inter their bones. But by the liver an' lights o' Barney, laddy-mate, they's times when they's nuthin' like some action for on'y half-sick men like us. We put it up to Cap'n Perry, an' he was damn ap-

preciative, but he give us orders to stay an' sot a marine guard to the bottom o' the stairs to make 'em stick; he did. The pure gall o' the cap'n fair staggers us, mate. He's ready to fight it out wit' his ships on'y a third manned."

"Some more men came from York State today, didn't they?"

"Huh! Cap'n, he was waitin' fer two hundert; sixty come. We had to do this; can't y' see?"

"How about the Friend?"

"Blast me, 'twas his idee! Now, you sing loud, mate, to cover them lads a-droppin' down the topsides o' this here hulk. My lad, the guns'll speak at last."

There were five men and himself left when Chid finally stopped singing. The Quaker, looking more than ever like Pan, peered at Chid through the echoes of the bare loft, and dimmed the lantern.

"Thee is not leaving the singing, friend?" he inquired.

Chid hadn't thought of it. He doubted that he had the strength to let himself to the ground. But he suddenly wanted to go, to leave this place which had been almost a prison, to also do something.

"A-yep," Chid said, "I'm goin'."

"Every man was his own judge," the Quaker said, "but for thee 'tis different. Thee is yet plainly weak, friend."

"I want to go."

"So be it then." The Quaker's eyes held respect. "Some of us," he said quietly, "cannot fight. But, friend, 'twas Jesus Christ Himself who gave authority to help where help be needed. Tom Shad, friend, give a hand if 't please thee."

Shad and two seamen hauled the end of the escape rope to the sill. With quick expert motions Shad threw a French bowline into the fall. He swung the bights over Chid, one to sit on, the other for a body support. Then the three men lowered Chid to the ground.

"Go with God," the Quaker called softly from the window. "Aye, and make it passing hot for the British, friend."

Chid did not answer. Ahead of him lay a cleared pasture and beyond was the shore of Erie and the blackness which shrouded the fleet. It would be moving at last, moving stealthily through the inky moonless night to thread the narrow channel and spread its wings before a surprised and

unprepared enemy with the dawn. There were men swimming to the vessels, to be hidden by understanding mates until the battle rattles called. On the dark peninsula the pit guns would be manned; the rowboat, holding position against the freshening south wind over the channel, would have a shuttered blue lantern ready to guide the pilots. Chid heard the slow, muffled clink of capstan pawls far offshore. That would be his own *Ariel*, getting ready to follow her towing boat.

He felt a sudden exhilarating pride in his own part in the building of the fleet. It had been body-killing work. Whatever this land was to mean to him, it would always be good to know that he had had a hand in carving and winning it.

He felt virtuous and no longer troubled or questioning about patriotism and sacrifice. If fate was tempered with justice, he would have his reward. He had given as much as any man in the building of these ships. So had many others, and like them he, too, would now go on to his reward. He could give no more; nor could fate in justice ask for more.

It was now up to Captain Perry and the fleet.

Before another sunset the fate of the lake would be decided. The land and the water would be made safe and secure for America, for his dreams and his ambitions, for Mary and the life ahead for them both. Or it would not.

Chid walked rapidly, fighting against the quick tiredness that surged through him. He walked south, along the Waterford Turnpike. He was on Mrs. Baxter's horse, over her vehement protests at the wisdom of it, before midnight. He slept for a few hours in Azial's blankets in the rude lean-to on one of the hauled-out arks.

At dawn he was at work, taking it easy, conserving his strength. He paused from time to time to listen, resting the iron-bound calking mallet on his shoulder. But there came no rumble of cannonading from the direction of the lake.

Chapter Twenty

CHID WAS AWARE first of the scolding of the disturbed crows far back from the Le Boeuf shore; then the absolute stillness of the forest as its life waited. Presently he heard the complaint of a dry axle. Chid calked on until he could see the wagon. Time was precious. At last the outfit came into view on the cart path skirting the creek bank. Azial Baxter swayed on the summit of a huge pile of natural crooks and knees. Beside him was a passenger whom Chid did not at first recognize.

"Chid!" Azial greeted. "Dang it, the way Mrs. said, I 'spected to find you caved in. You all right?"

"Good," Chid said, "the old swing is coming back fine. The arks are about calked. Who you got along with you there?"

"Old friend o' yours, Chid. Come on him a-hoofin' it."

Chid saw who it was then, not believing until the passenger dropped to the grassy path shoulder and ran toward him.

"Nez!"

"Chid, you ol' son of a bitch!"

They clouted each other, gripping hands. "Whyn't you two kiss?" Azial grinned and commenced unloading. Chid sat down, exhausted by the greeting.

"What in nation you doing in seaman's uniform, Nez?"

"I jined the Navy Brigade, Chid. Lieutenant Packett, he stood me one too many snorts on Brother Jonathan down to a tavern in Uticy. I jined. But I ain't sorry, mind. I was a damn' fool to try to run away from it all, Chid. A man can't do it, an' I know it now. Just because you're *told* you can go, ain't no reason to *think* you can."

"Where's Antoine?"

"In Canada—captured."

"Nez, you better tell me about it."

"I aim to. I got lots to tell you, Chid. Come on in the shade."

Nez and Antoine both had enlisted. They had been made very drunk at Utica by Perry's recruiter, and neither had remembered much until they had awakened in a jouncing freight wagon bound west along the Great Genesee Road. Antoine had been resentful, cursing this new delay in reaching his beloved Otter. But he had been too sick the first several days to do anything about it, and when he was able to it was too late.

There were eighty-three recruits in the wagon train. They reached Erie shore on the fourth day and camped on the beach several miles west of the junction of the Black Rock road to wait for the boat from Presque Isle which a mounted courier had been sent for. On the second day of the encampment, lounging after the noon mess, they found themselves suddenly surrounded by a force of British marines and Indians. There was nothing to do but surrender without resistance. The British marine captain quickly divided the group to his liking. Thirty were selected, after questioning, as carpenters and blacksmiths and sent on board the armed schooner which had now come to anchor off the shore. They were, the whispered word had it, destined for the British navy yard in Canada where the new *Detroit* was being pressed to completion. Antoine was with this group. Lieutenant Packett and his yeoman, a beardless schoolboy, were held as military prisoners. The rest, obviously farmers, were divided into small groups and the Indians given orders to drive them to the south and scatter them.

Nez was in a group of twelve which was at once prodded along an old trace path by the delighted savages. Nez did not dwell upon the details of their escape from the Indians. Chid suspected that he himself had engineered it. But one early dawn near a great bog, ten of the party had washed warm drunken Indian blood from their bodies and retraced their steps. They had reached Presque Isle on the morning of the day that Chid had left the pest chambers.

"You were in the fight yesterday, then, Nez?" Chid asked.

"What fight? There was none, Chid. I was put on the *Ariel* 'cause I knew her so good. Us schooners got through the channel fine. We waited till daylight for the brigs, but nary the *Niagara* or the *Lawrence* got through. They was a peppin' south wind, you recollect, an' not

hide nor hair o' the British fleet. 'Twas our one chance, an' we muffed her."

"Not enough water?"

"Not enough by twelve inches, even with the brigs lightened. They both stuck fast. An' don't you think 'twas bunglin', Chid. Perry and Uncle Noah done all they could. The fault's way beyond them, back to them stinkin' patriots what held up shot an' powder an' crews so long whilst the lake was deep an' the bar could've been crossed any time."

"Perry can try today again. The wind's varying northerly."

"The hell he can; not for a long while to come he can't, Chid. There's the devil to pay an' no pitch hot at Presque Isle. The *Lawrence's* got herself a stove bow, from settin' on a ledge. An' she careened so far she commenced bustin' o' yards an' top hamper. We got her beached, waitin' on shipbuilders that ain't to be had. Off the mouth is the hull British fleet now. They can't get in an' we can't get out, an' it suits 'em fine. Word come this mornin' that their army's gettin' ready to move south. Chid, this hull nation right now ain't worth one hoot more'n Perry's chances o' gettin' into the lake to fight."

Nez stretched out on the cool sod, chewing a switch of black hazel, drawing the sweet cloying oil from it. He looked gaunt and unusually thin. His beard was beginning to sprout in reddish stubble again. He regarded Chid in a long appraisal for several minutes; then spoke abruptly.

"This here call ain't all social, Chid," he said. "I been detailed to locate you to help repair up the *Lawrence*. There's no real shipbuilders to Erie save you an' me an' Uncle Noah. Did you get out o' the pest house with the others?"

"A-yep. How did Perry take it?"

"Like you'd 'spect, Chid. He like to cried, then he give 'em all three lashes an' doubled their rum dots for the duration. He made the Quaker hon'ary fleet chaplain. He sez any parson who can say 'Go with God an' give the British hell,' or some such, ain't no ordinary man."

"He said that to me, Nez."

"Tom Shad said he did. He thought you was goin' to join the fleet when he helped you get away."

"Nope. I came straight here, Nez. I just got to repair up the arks,

then load and ship. In eight days, I'm free with Noah Brown. I'll be a rich man then, Nez."

"I dunno, Chid," Nez said quietly. "Uncle Noah thinks you snuck off an' joined the Navy. He says you're the beatin'est for a lad that had the notions you did to Portersville, but he's kind o' proud o' you, too. I couldn't find you no place, an' I got scared you'd crawled off some place an' got the fever worse. Elliot, he give me leave to find you; you see, Uncle Noah promised you to Perry, to the nation, you might say, Chid. The *Lawrence* has got to be fixed afore we try again."

"So you're going to try again?"

"Why, for certain! We'll likely get a north wind an' a high lake again."

Chid studied the shimmering Le Boeuf, his eyes averted from Nez. He was suddenly hotly angry.

"You might," he shrugged, "but I ain't building my plans on it any more. By jing, Nez, do they think I'm a damn' idiot? I did my share and more. I did everything that was asked of me. I stuck to Noah Brown and to Perry. I took starvation and driving and sickness—"

"Chid!"

"I mean it. I did my duty, Nez. Nobody is promising me to the nation, not again. I've given up opportunity, the chance to make money—why, I could have had two hundred dollars for helping a British marine escape that was exchanged for a lousy relative of General Lewis's. John Shallus would have paid me anything I asked to log ship timber for him. That money would have bought my shipyard, Nez; right out, for cash. I'm sick of it, I tell you, I—"

"Shut up, Chid! You better know that I'm under orders to fetch you back—by the seat o' your britches if I have to. I b'lieve in them orders sincere. I'm warnin', Chid."

"I don't give a goddamn! I'm a freeman, and I'll take so much—then I'll fight. Only I'll fight like Congress does, and Chauncey and their contractors and the Navy and five out of every six people I ever met, for myself! Lie, cheat, steal, delay, blunder, and not even our rightful pay, not even thanks. I'm sick to the gut of it all. The fleet can go to hell for all I care. It's ruined. Stupidity ruined everything we did; it can't save this country for me, and I'm through with it. I'm going south with

the arks, to make money—and be damned to anybody that don't show me a profit!"

Nez stood up and spoke with feeling, his dark eyes flashing, his fingers curling into hard fists. "God scorch your everlasting soul, Chid Alwyn," he cried bitterly. "I guess you found yourself at last."

Chid jumped to his feet, white and shaking. His blind anger, his disappointment and disillusionment, made him forgetful of his weakness. He swung a terrific surprise blow at Nez.

Nez, turning, saw it coming and parried it. He put up his own fists, in hasty defense, readying to return the blow. But he was suddenly aware of the pallor of Chid, of the trembling of him, the small, tight, fever-marked eyes. He reached quickly out with both clawlike hands. He grasped Chid's shoulders and spun him around. Then he held him helplessly before him and kicked him resoundingly. "For some," he growled, "there ain't nuthin's good as a smart kick in the stern. It's what a whole nation thinks o' you, Chid Alwyn!"

Chid stumbled forward into the tall grass of the riverbank. He lay there stunned and strengthless, unable to summon the power to rally and fight.

"I don't reckon you're even worth fetching in," Nez said disgustedly. "We don't want your kind to Presque Isle. This here," he said, reaching into his pocket and drawing forth a faded letter, "was in the shanty when I went there lookin' for you."

He threw the letter beside Chid and without a glance backward strode off on the cart path to the turnpike and Erie.

Chid spurred Mrs. Baxter's horse. He overtook Nez about a mile down the turnpike. The words and import of Livy Bracket's letter burned like hot coals in his mind. He felt suddenly physically strong. He was mad and determined, and in a desperate haste.

"Nez," Chid called and dismounted.

Nez stopped and stood sullenly at the side of the dirt road. Chid walked up to him, clenching his fists. Nez, looking puzzled, put up his guard slowly. Chid swung with his right fist. It smashed into Nez's long lean jaw, rocking him. Chid's left followed, rising from his knees. The impact lifted Nez from the ground, spoiling his own swing at

Chid. Chid was thinking clearly now, wasting no strength. He did not have much of it, but he knew whence it stemmed. He knew that, if he was careful, he'd have enough.

He parried Nez's blows with ease now. Twice more he smashed terrific rights into Nez's jaw. On the third, Nez fell backward. He lay in the dust, collecting his senses, then started to rise slowly to his knees.

"You could throw your knife," Chid dared, panting.

"No," Nez grunted, "it was a fair lickin'."

"I wasn't aiming to lick you, just square up. You had enough, I'll tell you something."

"I had enough."

"All right. What I said still goes. I got the eternal right to say what I want. But I know now I can't *do* what I want. That letter changed everything. Get on the horse with me. I'm going back to Presque Isle." They did not speak in all the miles to Erie. They were abreast of Stone's Tavern when the silence between them was at last broken.

"Have a drink, Chid?"

"A-yep. And it'll be on me, Nez."

They went into the cool taproom. Coming over the last hill, Chid had seen the dipping white British sails beyond the bar. Through a stand of thinned forest, half-drawn on the beach, he had seen the hulk which had been the *Lawrence*.

"Have another, Chid?"

"Nope, I only wanted a thirst quencher."

"'Twas more'n a thirst quencher, wasn't it, Chid?"

"I reckon, Nez. A long time ago you said you'd be proud to call me a friend by what I did, not by what I said. Does that still go?"

"Yes."

"Thank you, Nez," Chid said quietly and took the hand that was offered. "Come on—there's work to be done."

PART III

THE VOYAGE

Chapter Twenty-one

THE *Lawrence* LAY upon the Cascade ways, a formidable monster lurking in her own shadow, reaching searching angular tentacles, laced with cobwebs of rigging, into the sky. It was a brilliant moonlit night in late July. The still bay was cleft by a path of silver extending into an infinity of soft blue water and heaven. On the distant dunes, a night creature laughed shrilly; under the counter of the brig, a feeding fish slapped the sleeping water. Beyond the bow of the brig, snuggling close against the limits of the shipyard, the forest brooded black and silent and dead. Occasionally, like a whisper in a cathedral, the gentle south wind sighed in the timber, tiredly and without spirit.

On either bow of the vessel, almost as if aglow with ghostly marsh-fire, gleamed two patches of raw white wood. But these grew gradually smaller and were replaced in time by wet blackness which captured the liquid moonlight in a patina of obsidian. At each patch a living shadow moved silently. On the quarterdeck of the brig another shadow moved; round and round, pacing the balustraded rail.

Chid was at the starboard patch at the bow. Azial Baxter was at the port one. They were painting, with thick pot lead, the crisp new planks which now sealed the wounds of the ship. Beneath the planking was a solid blanket of live oak, and beneath that strong, hand-hewn rock-elm timbers, notched and trunneled, fitting faithfully wood to wood and bedded in hard-driven oakum. It had taken six long, painful days of unceasing labor to make the hurt ship whole again.

Chid swung the corn brush with weary strokes, smearing the thick gummy coating on the hungry new wood. Presently he came shoulder to shoulder with Azial at the bow, and there were no more of the white patches. Neither man spoke. They placed their empty pots on the

scaffold from which they worked and wordlessly climbed to the deck of the ship by a sapling ladder from the lake shore.

Chid laid himself down on the bare midship deck. But Azial first went aft to the pacing figure.

"How now, Mr. Baxter?" Captain Perry whispered.

"Finished, sir. You can la'nch when yer a mind to; say after two-three hours to let the lead dry some."

"And the wind?"

"I'm sorry, sir," Azial said; "it'll be south ag'in tomorrer, like it's been this last week. I know this here climate, sir. Only a stiff norther would pile up the lake to where you need it, an' I don't see no norther in the signs."

"Thank you, Mr. Baxter. You have done a very fine thing in helping us out."

"Chid wanted it that way, sir," Azial said. "Took me right from my loggin', he did. But I'm kind o' proud to do it, sir. I fit pike an' piece in sev'nty-nine, with the Penn Rifles; but a corn brush's 'bout all I can handle now. Ain't you sleepin' none 'tall, sir?"

"I wish I could, Mr. Baxter. I wish I could."

"Good night, Cap'n."

"Good night, Mr. Baxter."

Azial lay down beside Chid. The watchman came to them and slid back the shutter of his lantern, letting the pale yellow beam fall on the two spent men. They were both asleep.

The man peered long into the night over the vast still lake. Then he marched noiselessly on bare feet over the smooth white deck to the bronze bell on the forecastle poop. He struck it four times, with two double swings of the clapper.

"Four bells . . . an' all's well; the flagship."

And like echoes, from the unseen reaches of the bay, came the silver answering four strokes from each ship of the Lake Erie fleet.

Chid stirred in his dead sleep to the trembling of the great wooden bulk beneath him. He had the sensation of dropping rapidly down and through a steeply slanted subterranean tunnel filled with a rumbling roar. There seemed to be no light, no end, to the tunnel. It led on, and always down, to some fearful terminal. He struggled against it, trying

frantically to clutch at the dank, staved walls. But the walls were coated with slimy curdled pot lead, and his fingers always slipped. There was a fearful brink ahead, deep and damp and black. His speed increased, became crazy with a curious swaying, twisting motion . . . there was no hope, no hope . . .

"Easy does it, matey-lad," a kindly voice said, and he felt himself being shaken. "Belay the scramblin' o' ye, sez I. We're water-borne, mate; in the bay ag'in. Cease it, sez I; pipe it down; the Master-at-Arms'll have ye up to mast fer tipsyin' too sufficient las' night."

"I ain't drunk," Chid growled, awakening.

"God's truth, mate. Yer tired, damned tired, done in an' no way on. I seen what you done, lad, an' I'm fair admirin'. 'Twould a-taken 'em twenty days down to East Boston Navy Yard, I swear—twenty at least."

It was the old seaman beside whom Chid had sat on the night the fever patients had escaped from the pest chambers. The man was now bright and alert, and his pallor was giving way to a bronze weathering. He smoked an iron pipe, tamping the coarse glowing tobacco coals from time to time with a horny, insensible thumb.

"You was under orders to be restowed anyways, lad," the sailor grinned. "The pipe's called fer long gun practice. We'd soon have ye mashed under the broad-wheels in yer present berth."

"How's the wind?"

"Sou'; still etarnel sou'."

"The British?"

"Off'n the bar, like alwus."

"I got to get ashore."

"Aye," the old man nodded, "we'll be after warpin' 'longside the fittin'-out berth's fast's Master Dobbins' longboats can tow."

The dawn mists were still heavy over the bay as the *Lawrence* was laid beside the wharf. Her stores, which had been taken off by lighter when she had partially capsized in the channel, stood waiting in great piles on the mole. From behind these now, stretching and yawning, appeared a band of ragged men.

Chid remembered that they had been expected. Lieutenant Forest, who had gone recruiting in Packett's place, had sent word of their coming. The men lined the wharf stringer, looking over the brig with

frank curiosity. Many had never seen a ship or boat of any kind before. They had come sober, drunk, needy, some even vengeful, a motley hinterland rabble with questioning eyes and an odd belligerence. Forest understood them. They could be coaxed and wheedled, perhaps gently prodded, but on them the lash must never be used. They were not like his enlisted men. These men were proud freemen, citizens, volunteers. They had come because he had personally convinced them of the great need, of the peril that threatened their families and homes; he had begged them, pleaded with them, making them understand.

Forest formed them into a ragged line now, each man a pace behind his pack or his carpet bag. He walked to the bow of the *Lawrence*, pointing as he explained the mysteries of the strange vehicle.

"This is the bow, men. Not the front, please; the bow, B-O-W. The other end is the stern, S-T-E-R-N, stern. Now, then all together. Let's show Captain Perry how lively we are. This?"

"Bow."

"This?"

"Stern."

"Excellent. Come aboard, please. Now, then, this side, when you look toward the bow, is always the starboard. Starboard; right hand is starboard. Left hand is larboard; larboard."

"Starboard."

"Larboard."

A short fat farmer of forty stepped out of line, raising his hand timidly, like a school child.

"When de we fight, mister?"

"Sir, please. Always, when you address an officer, it's sir."

"Aye. When do we fight, sir?"

"We'll learn how first, my man. Now, between bow and stern, bounded, you might say, by the rail to starboard and the rail to larboard, is the midship. Aft of the midship is the quarterdeck. Respect it; you are permitted there only in the line of duty or by invitation."

Chid went over the gangplank. The scene filled him with new impatience. He could admire the spirit of the men, of Forest and his hard-working fellow officers. But the remembrance of the wasteful stupidity and indifference that had made all this pathetic belated preparation

necessary made his blood boil. Nothing now moved fast or well enough for him. Casting his debility aside like a hindering great-coat, he had worked harder and longer and to more effect than ever before in his life, than he could ever have believed possible. The hurried, fevered days of spring, when the fleet was building, were child's play in comparison.

Nez had taken over the spar repairing, Chid the hull. Both had impressed from the fleet what labor they needed, but it was mostly untrained and at best but extra brawn. Save Noah Brown, who had himself taken up his tools when he could be spared from his drawing board and the procurement of the materials which Chid and Nez demanded, there were no shipbuilding brains available.

Each day the jaunty little schooners tacked back and forth on the bay side of the bar, skirting the exposed sands, harassing the enemy fleet and guarding the channel entrance, which was now plainly visible between two sand spits. Perry feared a concentrated attack of the British light-draught vessels or the launching of a fire ship through it. But day after day, as the great *Lawrence* was readied, the schooners held off an offensive.

Chid was filled with a vast impatience. The lake was dropping slowly but steadily. The wind held calm or south for days on end. With Noah Brown and Captain Perry he had figured and refigured trying to find means of unburdening the *Lawrence* and the *Niagara* enough to pass through the channel. It simply could not be done. One means defeated the other. To lighten to the draught now necessary meant the almost certain capsizing of the ships in even a faint puff of breeze. To remove the spars, or send down the topmasts to prevent capsizing, would leave the vessels helpless before the enemy. To strip them of the heaviest of the guns robbed them of the power of defense. There was no hope save a sustained strong northerly blow; a storm to raise the lake level and one other thing. Chid was going now to meet with the captain and Mr. Brown about that. He had no idea what it might be.

He walked quickly up the path to the town. Today, he did not pause to gaze upon the shipyard site beyond the Cascade Falls.

He was utterly weary of dreaming or planning except for one thing. The letter from Livy Bracket had been a chilling shock. From the moment he had read it, lying there on the grass where Nez had kicked

him, he had been possessed of a dogged stubborn will to fight for and win the one component of his dream that alone mattered, Mary.

He had thought of her every moment since. She filled his waking and his sleeping hours. He pictured her, alone, bravely guarding Moses, in the wilderness fort of Detroit, moving about in the confusion of an army preparing for battle, amidst drunken red savages and leering white men; hungry, tired, unprotected; a prisoner. Moses, sick and weak, might be dead. Mary might be utterly alone and friendless. His weary brain played cruel tricks on him, reminding him always of a new danger for her. Sometimes, at night, he would wake, thinking that he had heard her call...

The four partly repaired arks, drawn up on the muddy banks of the Le Boeuf, and the piles of stacked timber which represented his entire wealth were forgotten. Nothing mattered but that the fleet must be repaired and launched into the lake to meet and defeat this thing which had taken Mary from him. Through the whipping battle flags and the powder smoke of the savage little schooners, through all the preparations which seemed so futile and hopeless, he could see nothing but the image of Mary.

Noah Brown and Perry sat at breakfast in the cool, darkened dining room of the Buehler house. With them was a perspiring little man, obviously nervous and upset. Chid knew him to be a Justice of the Peace named Strange; a petty politician working hard at Stone's and elsewhere to arouse the Erie citizens to demand full township status from the Legislature. He owned a site upon which he believed a courthouse, if Erie got one, would look well and a small job-printing shop where, if the lake remained American, he planned to publish a weekly newspaper.

He nodded briefly to Chid, then turned again to Captain Perry with whom he had been conversing.

"I ain't exactly scared, captain," the little man said. "I just want to know what's best to do, that's all. A heap of folks have gone south. Them British guns drive more away every day. I ain't one to waste my time on a doomed land."

"What you need is faith, sir," Perry said gravely.

"I got it; in myself, Anthony Herkimer Strange, sir. What else might a man have faith in in such times?"

"The United States of America, sir—and her Navy and her Army and her future."

"Aye, the future interests me, I'll own. Do you calculate this land will stay set, saying you somehow lick them British?"

"I give you my word, it will, sir," Perry said with conviction. "But, man, don't be so pessimistic. Try to think of this territory as it will be in ten years, in fifty. I'll tell you what victory will do for it: You'll see the mid-channels of these great lakes the boundary line between our country and Canada. You'll see great cities—grown from villages like York and Erie and Cleveland and Fort Detroit and Fort Dearborn—dot the shores of these lakes. You'll see canals, and packet service, perhaps by steamboats; you'll see astounding things come down the lakes from this new nation, timber and grain and salt and beef cattle and perhaps even the iron and copper ore of which we hear rumors. And up the lakes will go settlers and emigrants and educators and ministers of the Gospel; ideas and ideals and culture. But across the lake, in both directions, will go the greatest commodity of all—the good will and mutual respect of the people of the United States and the people of Canada. We are not much different, Mr. Strange; we both love liberty and freedom, we are both nations of freemen. Don't go south, Mr. Strange. Stay here, where it is uncrowded; where this community and a hundred like it will need men of courage and vision. You have the courage, Mr. Strange; you took it in hand when you came here. You fought down the Indians and a hundred pioneer perils—it's your land by right of conquest. It has become my duty to preserve it to you forever. Before God, I believe that the future will be as I have told you, Mr. Strange."

The little man stood up, turning his hard hat in his hands, resolution in his eyes.

"I never seen it quite that way, sir," he said. "It—it does kind of buck up a man's faith. You're a specialist, Captain Perry; you know fightin' like I know printin'. You certainly ought to know what you're talkin' about, seems. I reckon I'll fix to remain, sir."

"You'll make no mistake, sir. Unborn generations of Americans will live and prosper in the border nation which I have described to you."

Mr. Strange hesitated at the door.

"Could a man of fifty-two—I mean could I be, well, useful, captain?"

"Men of seventy are serving guns on my ships, Mr. Strange. If you will report to Lieutenant Forest, sir, he will welcome you."

"Thank you, captain. And I won't be alone, damme, sir. I'm a bit of a politician, sir. I have sort of an organization. I calculate I can sway 'em when I've a mind to."

Mr. Strange left, leaving the room curiously empty. Perry sat staring before his empty breakfast dishes, wrapped deeply in his thoughts.

"You've promised him a hatful, Oliver," Noah Brown said thoughtfully.

"No more than is possible," the captain replied gravely. "I believe in that future; it is the only justification for the suffering and dying that is to come—that has been."

"It is predicated entirely upon your meeting and defeating the British fleet, Oliver."

"I know the British. I know their strategy and their mode of sea fighting. I am not worried, Noah. What I told our Erie friend is predicated upon but one thing, getting the *Lawrence* and the *Niagara* into the lake. That is the main and pressing problem. Its solution can remain no longer dependent upon the chance good fortune of a north wind. We now have the guns and the shot and the man-power. We have but to meet the enemies of our country, and they are ours. I have promised so to Commodore Chauncey—to the President himself, Noah. I am not afraid, nor in doubt. But once again, the whole nation is dependent upon you shipbuilders."

"You'll find us willing," Noah Brown said quietly. "But I don't know that you'll find us able. There are only Alwyn and Nott and a few boys and myself, Oliver. We are all of us spent and tired to death. But what do you want done?"

"I want floats, camels; four of them at least. And girders—and the brigs pierced for them."

"Pontoons!" Mr. Brown breathed softly. "Upon which to raise the brigs and lift them over the bar. Damme, it's clever! It's possible! Chidsy, do we have plank whipped?"

"No, sir."

"Do we have girders; say four of them sixty feet long and stout enough to support the weight of an entire brig?"

"Manned and all guns mounted," the captain amended.

"No, sir. Not cut. I know of standing trees..."

"So do I, Chidsy. It's the man-power that we need; to make plank, to fell trees, to build these great camels. It's a task almost as huge as building a brig itself, Oliver."

"I'm well aware of it. But can you do it? In, say, three days at the most? Harrison is being pushed. The fleet alone can save him and prevent invasion."

Chid saw Noah Brown make a gesture which he had never seen him make before. He shook his head sadly.

"No man could," he said simply.

"You can have a hundred men from the fleet, Noah."

"Brawn only. I need skill and experience; shipbuilders, Oliver."

The captain pushed back his chair and rose slowly to his feet. He walked to the long window facing the bay. He stood there, silent and brooding, for a long time. He saw, dipping and tacking like sporting gulls, the white sails of the two fleets on their eternal patrol of the channel which cut the yellow bar. He heard from time to time the distant boom of single long guns, the sound following long after the puff of yellow smoke from under the bellied sails. Back and forth the opposing vessels tacked, like gamecocks facing each other from opposite sides of a picket fence.

LeGrand entered silently. He stood respectfully at Perry's side, holding out a silver tray upon which lay a folded dispatch. Perry was not aware of him until the Negro touched him lightly on the sleeve.

"Fum de navy yahd, suh."

Perry read the dispatch, refolded it and put it into his pocket. Then he turned to Noah Brown and Chid.

"I asked too much," he said. "But when man can do no more, God may do it for him. Gentlemen, Master Dobbins reports the wind veering strong east and very likely to swing north before nightfall."

Chid and Mr. Brown left by the front door. The great Eli Terry clock still boomed out the seconds in solemn cadence. Chid noted that it was a few minutes after ten o'clock. And then, with an odd impersonality, an

indifference, he saw something else. The dial which showed the moon phases stood on the significant figure of August the first.

They walked up French Street. The day was bright and clear, suggesting a crispness most unusual for summer. Many of the houses and shops of the settlement were closed, the windows boarded up and the weeds growing tall and golden in the flower beds. There were not many people about, and those who were walked with apprehension, worried eyes upon the lake.

Mr. Brown paused before the saddlery of William Denny.

"I must go east," he told Chid. "The Navy wants a fleet built on Lake Champlain. An invasion attempt is expected there, too. I can offer you," he said carefully, "journeyman's wages and a good situation there, Chidsy. I had thought that you, not I, would be the one to remember what this day is."

"I just remembered it," Chid said. "I've looked forward to it for years, seems 's if, Mr. Brown—journeyman, at last. It's hard to believe. But I can't go with you to Lake Champlain."

"Not even as foreman, Chidsy?"

"No, sir. I don't know what I'm going to do. I was all set—until, well, things suddenly changed. I was going into business right here, sir."

"I'd not like to see you desert your trade, Chidsy. You are almost a Carmody."

"I wasn't meaning to desert my trade, sir. I love it, and it's all that I know. I was going to open a shipyard."

"On Erie?"

"On Presque Isle bay. I had it all picked out. A man couldn't find a fitter location—deep water, high solid banks to save manhandling; behind it all the timber in the world, and—"

"Then you found some stakes on it one day, Chidsy? An option had been given."

"A-yep," said Chid, "that's right."

Mr. Brown studied Chid for a long minute, chuckling to himself in a curious, delighted way. He suddenly put his arm about Chid's shoulders, as a proud father might embrace his son.

"Chidsy, I don't know why not. I don't indeed. Brown and Alwyn; shipbuilders." Noah Brown laughed. "I was the one who optioned that

site. For the same reasons that you wanted it, for the same reasons that the captain just pointed out so solidly to Mr. Strange. But it could be Brown and Alwyn; it could indeed."

"I was figuring to build steamboats when the time was right."

"Why not? I told you—was it coming up the lake from Black Rock?—that I believed in them. You are smart, Chidsy. The Fulton-Livingston combination hasn't yet throttled these lakes with their stifling franchises. Smart and forehanded—I don't know but that I'd rather have you a partner than a competitor."

"I reckon," Chid said, "that I could work with you, Mr. Brown. Trouble is, my money is tied up. I've been in a little venture down Waterford way and it's—well, not working out good. You'd want some money?"

"Yes," Mr. Brown said carefully, "with you, I would, Chidsy."

"Well, I'd want to put my share in. Seems 's if, with the power of money behind me, I'd really be a partner. You couldn't change your mind about me without it costing you."

Mr. Brown chuckled, not displeased. "I hadn't thought of it in exactly that way," he admitted, "but there's nothing wrong with the reasoning. Chidsy, besides stage accommodations, friend Denny trades in my favorite Madeira. Will you join me?"

"Obliged," said Chid and followed Mr. Brown into the harness shop.

They sat on an unpainted spoke-bench. Denny, passing tumblers, poured the rare wine from a stone jug.

"Next coach is tomorrer, at six in the evening, sir," the harness maker said. "It's an uncertain service yet. Bango Cutler, what drives, don't know the roads good yet; fact, they's plenty places they ain't no roads. But Bango, he greases the axles an' straps good an' rides the slickest o' the buffalo traces. Some on the boys think stage service is damn previous. Personal, sirs, I got faith in this here territory."

"It's not at all previous, Mr. Denny. You stick to your faith," said Mr. Brown. "Chid, to Brown and Alwyn."

"To a north wind, Mr. Brown," said Chid. "That's what I want first of all."

They talked for almost an hour. To Mr. Brown, the new yard was merely another in his growing chain of shipyards; opportunity and the chance of a bright, promising partnership. To Chid, thinking about

those deserted arks and the timber on the lowering Le Boeuf and of Mary, it was like planning for a Christmas that was past.

All that first day of Chid's freedom, the wind held east. It slackened, then veered, sometimes north and sometimes south; but when it again steadied, it blew from the east. On the bay, the fleet was getting ready to cross the bar. The *Lawrence* and the *Niagara* were lightened to bare guns and shot until they stood two feet above their normal waterlines. One by one, the schooners were signaled in and additional temporary guns slung onto them. The long boats, towing lighters, crossed the choppy bay many times laden with field-pieces that had been spared by Harrison's weary forces to the west. These were drawn quickly to hastily dug earthworks on the peninsula and trained upon the lake beyond the bar. The raw recruits which Lieutenant Forest had marched in the night before were already assigned to ships. Mr. Strange appeared at the wharf, ready for duty in a borrowed Pennsylvania Brigade uniform, stiffly shouldering an antique ball-and-patch musket. Behind him were twenty men, his political party. On the first hill, behind Erie, an old bosun watched a wind weft two-blocked at the top of tall lightning-shivered pine. In his seabag was a red pennant, the signal to Erie for a north wind.

Chid was desperately tired. On every second day he still felt the torments of the lake fever. Today had been one of those days. He watched the preparations of the fleet as long as the daylight permitted with petulant impatience. There was no sunset tonight. A damp gray murk stole in from the east at dusk and pervaded the sky from horizon to horizon. Just before complete darkness fell he took a last look at the signal pine behind the settlement. The wind weft still waved from it, pointing lazily to the westward; but no red pennant flew from the halyards.

He had not thought of a place to sleep. From habit he trudged up the path to the old shanty office.

He was not aware of the figure which waited on the block step until he was almost upon the man.

"Mr. Alwyn?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Peleg Ruskin, United States marshal."

"A-yep," said Chid with a sinking sensation, "I'm Alwyn. What do you want?"

"To talk; private."

"Come in."

Chid struck fire to the stub candle. Ruskin, he noted by its pale gleam, was a chubby middle-aged man with a moon face and alert gray eyes. His trousers were tucked into cloth boot tops and he smelled, strongly but not unpleasantly, of horse. He seated himself with assurance, as if taking possession of the dusty room. Chid noted that belted under his coat there was a flint-lock pistol, its brass-bound handle conveniently turned forward for a quick cross draw.

"What do you want to talk about?" Chid said carefully.

"Well, Mr. Alwyn, several things. Let's begin at the beginning. What do you know about a privateer called the *Blessed Cause*?"

Here it was, at last. Chid felt suddenly ill. All these months, though unremembered for days at a time, that trouble had hung over him to shadow even his brightest moments.

"Never heard of her," Chid said, making circles in the wax candle drippings.

"Let's get understood between us, Mr. Alwyn," Ruskin said without annoyance. "I know most of the story and can guess the rest. It would be better for all concerned that you don't let me guess too much."

"All right," Chid said, "I know her; I wish I never had. You'd better say where I stand, first, though."

"Fair enough," Ruskin said. "I want your statement as a witness for the United States in the trial of one Bolt, United States prisoner, and one George Lefferts, whereabouts unknown, for assorted crimes, including piracy and murder."

"Lefferts is in the British Navy," Chid said. "I met up with him once when we took a schooner away from them."

"You did? My boy, you should've hung onto him."

"Well, I didn't. Where'd you find Bolt?"

"He was easy—in a hospital on Staten Island, recovering from wounds that would kill an honest man. By that time we had the stories of the crew pretty well sorted out. The court could not help but wish to believe those men, especially two chaps called Griswold and—Reefer, I think

the name was. But we had to have proof. We let Bolt go free and trailed him. He met Lefferts in Carolina, and we caught them redhanded digging into a cache near Wilmington Beach. But Lefferts scared, and he shot one of our boys dead and skedaddled."

"You found the money he took away in the boat?"

"Not very much of it. Lefferts was aiming to cheat Bolt, I guess—he'd already taken the lion's share for himself. But we found enough to break up Bolt's defense that the crew had taken the money and divided it. The Jamaican nigger crucified them both aplenty for the slaughter of his mates. Then we got after that matter of the murdered captain—not that it was a great loss, y'understand. But murder is murder. Now, answer, careful, Mr. Alwyn. Did you hit Captain Fish with a pistol butt?"

"Yes."

"Where was Bolt when you did it?"

"On the other side of Fish. He was wounded."

"Aye. Was he in a faint, out cold?"

"No. I heard him cursing, a couple of times."

"Then he could have stabbed the captain after you pistoled him, hey?"

"A-yep. Look, I didn't do any stabbing, Mr. Ruskin. I—I can't prove it perhaps. But I didn't do it."

The marshal looked at Chid keenly, studying him.

"So that's why you broke arrest and lit for here, hey?" he said finally.

"A-yep. I couldn't see how I could get out of that. I had a chance with the other stuff. I mean the mutiny and piracy."

"Mr. Alwyn," Ruskin said, lighting a Havana from the candle, "you made a common mistake; innocent, you fled from the law. Dammit, sir, didn't it ever occur to you that this is a free country? Didn't it ever occur to you that the law and the gov'mint is just as interested in freeing an innocent man as convicting a criminal?"

"N-no."

"Well, it is. What in nation do you think justice is? Words? Mouthings? It ain't, sir, not by a long shot. It's a national way of living, it's every man's right to stand on his hind legs armed with nothing but God's honest truth and come out on top. The law don't persecute, it prosecutes—and it turns up as many innocent men as guilty ones out of

these wicked pitfalls of circumstance that folks get themselves involved into. Don't you ever forget that, Mr. Alwyn."

"Well," Chid said, "where do I stand?"

"Free as a bird," Ruskin replied. "Your story checks; you told me the absolute truth. Griswold, he saw just what you told me."

Mr. Ruskin stood up and drew a large silver watch from his pocket.

"Whew! Nigh on to midnight, Mr. Alwyn," he said. "Now, I'll have to write this out and have you swear to it. It'll clear you legal and cook Bolt's goose."

"Surely. I'm willing to swear."

"Good. I'll look you up in a couple days. Ain't this war terrible? By God, I hope that Perry gets it settled soon. Things are at a standstill on the coast, waiting on him, I suppose. Say—if you ever lay hands on that Lefferts, save him for me."

"I don't reckon I will, Mr. Ruskin."

"No telling, no telling. He must have all of thirty thousand dollars belonging to you boys. Well, good night, Mr. Alwyn."

"Good night, Mr. Ruskin."

Chid, undressing, felt buoyant lightness. He had never before fully realized the depressing weight of that *Blessed Cause* trouble. But it had been present always, like a threatening cloud that would some day move into the brightest of his skies and spill its storm and destruction upon him.

He could understand Moses Leet's advice now. "Was it peace times," Moses had told him, "I'd say for you to return and get it all settled legal-like. You're innocent, ain't you?"

Yes, he was innocent, proved so now. It was good to be shut of the whole matter, even the memory of it. But, like the handsome offer of Mr. Brown's, it gave him no great unalloyed joy, no real freedom. He could think of nothing but Mary. She alone mattered in all his tumbled world.

He had done all that he could to free her. For him, as for the nation, it was in the hands of Oliver Hazard Perry. As soon as that north wind came, the fleet would be over the bar and on Erie. One brief, decisive battle, and Harrison would move upon Detroit. His banners would march upon the fort. A hundred waiting Americans—farmers, soldiers,

settlers, craftsmen—would cheer the flag of liberty and freedom, be restored to its folds and to their loved ones.

Chid fell finally into dreamless sleep. An hour after he had closed his eyes it began to rain. It rained heavily and steadily; in fitful chilling gusts driven by a strong east wind that veered more and more to the south.

Chapter Twenty-two

"CHID!"

Chid awakened to rough shaking. Bleak, raw dawn filled the shanty; rain beat noisily and monotonously on the shed roof and splashed loudly into spreading puddles under the eaves.

"It's me, Azial."

"Hunh?"

"Stir yourself, Chid. You got a visitor."

"Ya-ah."

"Feller named Packett, Chid. An officer—you 'member him. He was taken by the British 'long with Nez an' your Canuck friend. He roused me an' Mrs. out two hours back, an' I hitched up an' brung him. Wake up, Chid."

Chid was aware of the rain-soaked figure beside Azial. Of course he remembered Packett; he'd commanded the *Ariel* before Perry had sent him east to recruit.

"I shouldn't be stopping, Mr. Alwyn," Packett said, his young face wan and drawn under a month-old blond stubble, "but it'll take but a moment to tell you."

"You got away?"

"Yes, from Fort Detroit, six days ago. Mr. Alwyn, I saw Miss Leet there—and her father, your friend Antoine—"

Chid jumped to the floor, fully awake.

"Tell me!"

"Don't worry, Mr. Alwyn. They're all all right. Miss Leet wanted you to know. It didn't work out so good, the idea of using prisoners on naval building. There were strange fires, missing tools; the damndest mistakes. Mr. Leet got sick again."

"Lieutenant—"

"It was faked, Mr. Alwyn. He didn't do a tap of work for the British. But Miss Leet played at nursing him. Antoine got into so many fights that they confined him. But they got the *Detroit* finished somehow, and she's on her way to join the squadron."

"What are they doing now?"

"Getting ready to attack, I take it."

"No, I mean Mary—Miss Leet; Moses?"

"Oh. Well, they're being taken east to Montreal to be exchanged. They'll be leaving any day now, by a galley called the *Lion*—a Bermudian rigger, the only one on the lake. I'm asking the captain to warn our patrols to let her alone; a scrap would only see our own people killed."

"Thank you," Chid said. "Lieutenant, you're hurt."

"One of Tecumseh's savages—a spear, Mr. Alwyn." Packett shrugged and patted the empty sleeve which Chid had seen. "I had to crawl through the lines at night. Well, I must get along to Captain Perry and my ship. I have news of the utmost importance for him. I learned that the British squadron is to withdraw and join the *Detroit* at Malden; Royal Navy ceremony, Mr. Alwyn—full gun salute, Commodore Barclay to take formal command, and that sort of thing. Utterly silly at such a time, of course, but fortunate for us. I imagine it will permit us to get into the lake at once."

"Azial, where's the wind?"

"South as hell, Chid," Azial said gravely. "The lieutenant's news is good—if we could only get over the bar."

Packett turned at the door. "I'll walk into headquarters," he said. "You've been a real friend, Mr. Baxter. Oh, and Mr. Alwyn, Miss Leet said to tell you 'forever'; said you'd understand."

"Yes," Chid said quietly, "I understand. Good-by, lieutenant."

Azial wrung the rain from his soaked coat. "Chid," he said brightly, "south ain't a bad wind for you, not when it brings rain with it. The Le Boeuf is likely up to thaw levels; it'll hold so a day or more. You got a chance, boy. We get at them arks lively, we can send 'em south on the crest. Come on, I got the team outside, an' Mrs. went to rouse out Bugle an' his lads to load. Chid, you done all you can for the fleet; there ain't another blessed thing a mortal can do. Mrs. sez you got your girl now;

time to get after thinkin' about layin' by for her. We want to give you all the profits o' this first load, Chid; it's small payment for what you done for me an' Mrs."

Chid rose slowly, pulling on his pants with trancelike motions. He could never after recall his exact emotions then. They stemmed from deep within him, from depths which he did not fully understand. But he did not question them. Once again he held the solution of a vital problem within his own power. But, oddly, this time he required no strong motivation of self-interest, of profit.

"Look," he said slowly, almost in a whisper, "I've got everything I want, Azial. I'm free, I'm a journeyman, a foreman; Mary is coming back to me; Mr. Brown wants me as his partner in a shipyard. I got it all without money. But I can have a big chunk of that too, now. Azial, I reckon I been chasing the wrong thing, something that really doesn't matter."

"But, Chid, you got them things, like you say."

"Yes, I got 'em. But I don't really want 'em. I only want Mary and one other thing, I guess. Nez named it to me long ago. It's being able to live with myself, Azial; it's earning the right to have 'em—"

"Chid!"

"I been troubled, Azial. But I ain't any more. You want to help me. All right, you can. Take your team to Waterford, hire more teams, horses, oxen, wagons. Pick up Bugle and his gang—"

"Bugle's quicker'n a mink. He's a fast loader."

"He's not to load, Azial. Understand? Not to load. He's to get those arks up here to the navy yard. Tote them, snake 'em over the mud—I don't care how, just so he gets them here by noon."

"Chid, this is your hull future!"

"No, it isn't! I been thinking it was, that's all. I don't reckon any man has an individual future. It's only the nation that has a future; if that's lost, there's nothing ahead for any of us. Now go ahead, Azial; do as I say. I'll be getting the brigs ready. Nez will be felling those girders."

"You're goin' to use the arks?"

"A-yep. All four of 'em, for camels, pontoons."

"The wind might still come north."

"Might ain't good enough!"

"Don't get sore, Chid. I on'y want to help the way I allus figured you wanted it."

"I'm not sore, not at you, Azial. It's—it's at myself, I reckon. I got myself about everything I ever was after. But it's not enough, those things aren't really enough—"

"I don't foller, Chid."

"You got what I want, Azial. You won it, twenty-five years ago with the Rifles, and here on the frontier. Nez has it. He's the free-est man I know, but he's got it. So has Noah Brown for all his money, and Perry, and a little man named Strange. It's something beyond seeing and counting. I can't say it so good, but I can feel it; it's sort of a personal brand of respect, of freedom."

"You put her in pretty good words, Chid," Azial nodded thoughtfully, buttoning his coat. "A personal brand o' freedom—aye, when you get her, she's yours forever, Chid."

Azial plunged into the rain and climbed to the wagon seat, taking the sodden reins in his great paws. He clucked to the team. The horses snorted steam and slithered the wagon over the slick clay. With the great bulk of Azial Baxter hunched against the driving rain, the wagon disappeared into the wet gray mists.

Chid stared to the northwest for some minutes. Almost he could imagine that the murky sky in that direction was lighter, shot with streaks of promising blue, as if there, over Malden, the weather was smiling, as if there the rolling scud parted ever so slightly so that a whisper could come to him from across the watery miles—"Forever, Chid, forever and ever."

He ran as fast as he could for the mole where the two brigs lay, disconsolate and defeated.

In the dripping rain shroud the *Lawrence* seemed huge. She lay on the surface of the bay, her slab topsides enormous, in a still, unrippled pool. Around her, beyond her overhangs, the lake danced with the splashes of the rain drops, like wine in ferment. Her normal waterline, marked by hoary green bay weed, was far above the lake's surface. It was as if the bay had turned into molasses or butter and refused to cradle the vessel.

Chid stood idle on the wharf at last, hugging the lee side of the store shed. His tools were oiled and put away. He watched the great ship rise slowly out of the lake with satisfaction. He and Nez had been piercing the two brigs since early morning. They had cut four opposite matching ports above the normal waterlines. Real Taylor's men had inserted the girders thwartships, like giant skewers in a roast. Under the unbarked projecting ends of them the four arks from the *Le Boeuf* were now swamped. All day long the fleet had lain hidden in the folds of the lashing curtain of rain. The pumping had commenced at last.

Chid could hear the steady chunking of the wooden pumps as six men bent to the flailing yoke on each ark. The expelling water, adding to the wet desolation, splashed noisily into the bay, and from time to time the great vessel groaned as a new lifting strain was put upon her by the rising arks. The *Lawrence* rose steadily, ominously, like a giant lake squid emerging after ages from fearful subterranean caverns.

Noah Brown had climbed into the government carriage behind *Le-Grand* and left for the town. It was almost time for the stage from the west. Nez and Bob Crown's men completed the slinging of the girders on the *Niagara*. Now the gang waited on the wharf until it should be called to replace the carefully removed sections of planking over the girder ports. That would be after the brigs had been lowered by swamping the arks again, when they floated at last into Lake Erie.

O'Leary, in a light rowing boat, ghosted to the wharf, coming from the lake. He had stopped for a moment at the *Lawrence*, talking briefly with that figure on the quarterdeck which had been pacing the rail since early morning.

"Clear, bosun?" Nez called softly.

"All clear. The lieutenant's information was correct; not a Britisher on the lake hereabouts. Everything's auspicious, savin' that nor' wind."

"I reckon Chid Alwyn is our north wind, friend."

"That's God's honest truth, mister!"

O'Leary sculled the boat lazily away from the wharf. Chid could hear the steady suck of the blade; then the muted hail from the *Porcupine*, off in the rain, as he joined his ship.

The splashing of the pumps suddenly ceased.

"And how now, Master Dobbins?"

"She draws for'ard five feet, sir."

"And aft?"

"The same, Captain Perry; five on the mark, sir."

"Very well. Belay the pumping, Master Dobbins."

There was sudden activity in the dusk. Men had waited for this moment all day—all month, all year, Chid reckoned.

"Stand by the towing boats, Mr. Elliot. Master Dobbins, I take it we'll pass over the bar?"

"By a full twelve inches, sir."

"Get a strain on your hawsers, then. Signal out the schooners to protect the passage."

"Schooners proceeding to station, sir."

"You may commence towing, Master Dobbins. Lieutenant Forest, battle stations, please. Open your magazines and light your matches. Is the *Niagara* ready?"

"All ready, captain. She'll join us as fast as the pontoons can be returned, sir—say an hour."

"Very well. Into the lake then, men, to meet the enemy of our country!"

Slowly the *Lawrence* moved away from the mole, sliding like a ghost into the bleak mists of Presque Isle bay and Lake Erie beyond. Chid's last view of her was the momentary revelation of her battle flag, the stark white letters etched like silver strands against the coming night: "Don't Give Up the Ship."

Nez shook the rain from him and came to stand beside Chid.

"They'll be pipin' for carpenter rates immediate, Chid. Will—will you be comin'?"

Chid did not answer. He took Nez's extended hand and pressed it silently.

"It don't matter," Nez said very quietly. "I want you to know I'm proud to be your friend, Chid. Some on us fight with our blood, an' some with our brains, an' some with our dreams. It don't bother which, so long as the freedom a man finally gets is earned some way."

Nez dropped quickly into the waiting work barge. It followed the *Lawrence*, a tiny black smudge hung in horizonless gray space for a brief moment; then it, too, disappeared.

Chid was wet and chilled. He felt terribly alone. He turned his jacket

collar up and shoved his hands deeply into his pockets. Then, hunched against the storm, he climbed the footpath to Erie.

He understood that matter of freedom now. A little, anyway. He felt, looking back on this day, that he had achieved it; a measure of it, at least. You did not achieve it by acting or thinking freely. It had to be earned, as Nez knew, and the price was giving up station and fortune and dreams—even freedom itself—for a period or lose it forever. He had earned freedom, had paid for it. He reckoned he would value it forever. It had cost him everything. He had nothing more to give except one thing—

At William Denny's Chid turned off the board sidewalk. He pushed the door open. Inside there was a warm, wet smell of leather and harness oil and rain-soaked wool and logs burning on a grate. Mr. Denny stitched upon a worn cavalry saddle under a new-fangled lamp which burned an oil that ran out of the ground down near the central part of the state. Mr. Brown waited for the stage on the spoke bench. A few travelers lounged about the shop, inspecting the sketches showing views of a turreted brick building labeled Proposed County Courthouse.

Chid stood at the hearth, warming himself, watching the two pools of wet creep from under his shoes and soak into the limestone slab. He saw Mr. Brown then. The shipbuilder's beard had been trimmed to a civilized cut again. His feet rested on his carpet bag, and he sipped a tumbler of Madeira thoughtfully.

"The stage is late, sir."

"Bound to be on a day like this, Chidsy. I don't mind. I'm only thankful for the faith of the man—imagine, starting a stage line in the middle of a war."

"It must be a fearful trip."

They sat in silence listening to the drum of the rain and the cozy crackling of the fire. Hoofbeats suddenly splashed in the deep mud outside.

"She's come, gents," Mr. Denny announced triumphantly. "On'y forty minutes late. That ain't bad for wilderness goin', is it now?"

"Not bad at all, Mr. Denny," said Mr. Brown, taking up his carpet bag. "I hope we make as good time all the way to Champlain. Well, sir—

keep up your faith in this territory, Mr. Denny; it's a coming land, and I'll be back soon."

Noah Brown turned quizzically to Chid, "Well, Chid—?"

Chid swallowed hard. He wasn't afraid. But it would mean more delay, lost opportunity, disappointment—sacrifice. Almost he could wish for the help of the swirl of recruiter's flags, of shrill compelling fife music, the beat of drums and marching swinging feet. He had given so much. But it was not all, not all—

"It shall be the foremanship at Champlain, Chidsy. And Moses Leet with us after the exchange."

"Yes, sir."

"After that the shipyard here. The money can wait."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Denny's apprentice led out fresh horses. The militia guard sheathed his musket and climbed wearily from the box with the dispatch bags. Mr. Denny superintended with fussy pride. "To Buffalo, Geneva, Uticy," he trumpeted, "and Albany, with connections there to New York by boat—sloop or steamboat, folks—to Boston and Hartford by transfer coach, prime accommodations all the ways, no hardship for the wimmin or the childer. Lively, please you—Bango's late slight."

Chid stuck out his hand.

"I think I know what you have done, Chidsy," Noah Brown spoke softly. "Shipbuilding is essential, just as patriotic—you don't have to do this."

"I—I think I have to, Mr. Brown. Good-by, sir."

"Perhaps you do, boy, perhaps you do. Good-by, Chidsy."

He walked back to the lake front. Azial Baxter was just leaving. He stopped the team.

"Next spring we can raft again, Chid," Azial said. "I'll keep cuttin'. If it so be that Perry whups them British—"

"Yes, next spring, Azial."

He dropped to the log float at the head of the mole. A boat was just about to pull away.

"You passing by the *Ariel*?" Chid asked.

"Surely. Come aboard. You one o' Lieutenant Packett's boys?"

"A-yep."

"Volunteer?"

"You might say."

"Well, good luck tomorrer, lad. An' tell your mates—Don't give up the ship!"

"We won't," Chid said. "By God, we won't."

Chapter Twenty-three

CHID FINISHED THE letter which he was writing. His desk was an up-ended tub. He sat in the early shade of the *Ariel's* pivot gun, his breakfast of pork sausage and what Hercule Misereau, the misnamed cook, thought was Indian pudding, heavy on his belly. The dew was wet on the deck; it stood in thinning pools in the folds of the furled sails. The sun, though still only on the horizon, was strong and warm as it had been each day since the squadron had been searching for the British fleet.

The pine-wooded shores of Put-in Bay were cool and beckoning. Birds sang among the branches; the axes of the woodchoppers, cutting billets for the open brick deck fireplaces of the fleet, rang clear and clean, echoing against the solid rock face of lofty Gibraltar Point and the neighboring Bass Islands. The fleet sprawled in the sylvan bay, cables short as always. Already men were crawling aloft to the endless chores of maintaining the rigging, gun crews were at their eternal practice—fire, sponge; powder, ball, and patch, then ram—Chid had seen it for many days now.

He glanced anxiously aloft. The lookouts, the eternal watchers, were in their masthead barrels, sweeping the lake with extended telescopes, hoping for that rating of sailing master promised by the captain to the first man to cry the British fleet. "Any day now," Dan Dobbins had said, interpreting the gibberish of the Wyandot who had come out of the sunset two evenings ago, paddling his log canoe furiously. "Malden is gettin' short o' rations since we cut off the lake route from the Long Point base. Barclay has orders to sail east an' fetch stores. By God, sir, we'll have him out of his lair yet!" It might be today, Chid reckoned. The wind was southwest, moderate as yet; promising a good sailing day.

Chid's letter was to Aunt Leety. He had thought long before writing

it. For him it was not like for the other hands; he had no parents, no father nor mother save Moses and Abby Leet.

...and so, it will not be long now. We have been waiting—endless weeks, it seems to us—for the English fleet to stand forth from beneath the protection of Fortress Malden and give us battle. We are ready, indeed impatient. I hear from my mates always the cry that they must get home for autumn chores, for the harvest and woodcutting against the winter. After the battle, we will again be freemen, for our enlistments read “for four months or until a major engagement has been fought.” For many the four months is long past. Even I, who am one of the newest of the recruits, am impatient for the end, for that time of peace and prosperity that Captain Perry has promised us.

The captain has been stricken with a return of the lake fever. But he is on his feet again this morning. I can see him from where I write, pacing the quarterdeck of the *Lawrence* as impatient as the rest of us. He is truly a great man. Not one of us can help but feel the magic of him, his quiet faith and loyalty. Some of the malcontents, particularly a young lieutenant named Jesse Elliot, who has always been jealous of Captain Perry, growl that this is a one-man fleet; that we are lost should the captain fall. I do not think so. His example and his spirit have been transferred to his officers, to the ship’s boys, even to the two stupid Delawares who serve on my own vessel. My own commander, John Packett, I know, has been inspired by Captain Perry and even alone would follow the ideals and purposes of the fleet to the death.

But, dear Aunt, I would not write about only these matters. Rather, in this hour before the battle, it is to set my affairs in order. I have written above of Moses and Mary. They are to be free—possibly they are at this moment—and for that I am thankful. It sets the greatest of my affairs in order, for beyond them and yourself I have little of value on this earth.

But for that little, in the event that I do not return from what must come at any moment, I ask you to inquire of Maggie and Azial Baxter, of Eric. Whatever is mine they will surrender to you. I want one-tenth of any such sums to be given to Mrs. Slinker and the rest to come into the joint possession of yourself and Moses and to pass from you to Mary. And now, dear Aunt, I shall close this letter...

Chid folded the sheet into a packet and sealed it with a tallow dip. He was aware that it was a sober, mature letter; that he had never before

written one quite like it, so measured and carefully phrased. But he felt sober and suddenly mature, as if a juvenile period of preparation, of insignificant endeavor and achievement, had now passed, and the coming trial would be the real contest. The stake now would not be mere failure or disgrace; it would be life or death, for himself and for four hundred others.

He was not afraid. He did not regret his decision. Deep within himself he felt a calm, almost buoyant peace.

He dropped the letter into the leather dispatch bag which hung from the main fife-rail. There were other letters in it, addressed in smeared, labored writing. Mr. Knell's striker, a tow-haired boy named Steve Winter, was sealing the *Ariel's* log and code in a lead box. Gravely, then, John Packett took a turn around it with a codline, lashing it to the taff-rail. "Gentlemen," he said quietly to his sub-officers who lounged on the port side of the quarterdeck, "if we must strike, whoever survives—this must go overside."

"Very good, sir. I—I reckon it'll be there when—when it's all over, sir."

"I pray so, Mr. Macklin. But this, sir, is war, war..."

Nez honed his sheath knife on a foot-treadle grindstone forward of the knightheads. Behind him waited the armorer, in his arms a stand of cruel pikes and battle axes. A man danced jerkily on an upturned biscuit cask upon which a tiny shipmouse was tethered by a hind leg. The thin groups surrounding him were disinterested. Today the exhibition had no appeal; it did not matter if the swift feet crushed the mouse or not.

The piper played wearily, then suddenly pocketed his flute.

"Aw, the hell with it," he growled. "Stow it, Bob."

"What be I to do with the critter?" the dancer cried. "Half the watch-off I spent in the hold a'capcherin' o' the varmint. Throw your coins, boys, I be in me best fettle this fine mornin'. What ails o' ye all?"

"Belay it, Bob. Stuff yer damn' mouse in a shroud an' bury him to sea for all we care."

"That remark ain't funny mister, I snum, 'tain't."

"Aye, Tom Shad, souse that bastid down!"

Macklin irritably broke the group up, touching bottoms with the flat of his sheathed sword, his steely, troubled eyes fixed on the lake horizon beyond the low rail.

Even after he heard the lookout's lusty hail to the deck, Chid had the feeling that the fleet had tensed to the news several seconds before the cry. He heard the long-awaited call across the quiet waters, from the perch above the main royal yard of the *Lawrence*—"Ahoy the deck! Sail O, sir. Hull down a'lee, sir; mebbe five, mebbe six."

"British?"

"Aye, sir; out from the haze off Malden, sir. I make one a full ship, sir, wi' a schooner in the van—"

"Keep them in your eye, man!"

When Chid looked to the deck again, the dispatch pouch was gone. The mail gig was leaving from the port ladder, bound hurriedly for the other ships of the fleet. A white-haired veteran of Ti in leatherstockings but bare-waisted sat in the sternsheets. "Good luck, *Ariel*," he called and waved his one blue-veined arm.

Chid could hear the tinkling capstan music again, as he had heard it that night long ago when the *Ariel* had followed the blue light of the pilot over the bar. Sails tumbled to the deck, spilling the dew puddles. Without orders, sail-trimmers moved grimly to the halyards. The longboat, which had been trailing, crept up the flat transom, swayed two-blocked under the horned stern davits.

The figure on the *Lawrence's* quarterdeck was still now. Perry stood with his hands braced to the rail, feet spread, searching the lake beyond Gibraltar Rock. But Chid knew that he was listening, not seeing.

"How now, aloft?"

"Two ships, sir, another schooner—full an' bye, standin' east, sir. Avast, sir, there comes another! I make it a brig, sir. Aye, a brig—an' a schooner escorting. Red dusters all, sir—I reckon it's the British fleet, sir!"

Chid felt the tension which ran through the waiting ships, could almost hear the curl of bare feet as they sought to grip the smooth holy-stoned decks.

"Did you—make a writin', boy?" a voice asked at Chid's side.

"Yes, Tom."

"It's fitten," Tom Shad sighed. "Me—well, I can't write, to spit it right out bold, boy. Lookee, lad, I got a ol' woman to your state, daown Killingworth Taown way. I ain't seen her in twelve year but, times like this,

should anythin' happen, lad, you might say, a man sort o' feels he'd want her to know—"

"I'd let her know, Tom."

"Thankee, laddy-mate. Thankee kindly. Jerushy Shad 'tis if she still honors the name; Jerushy Annie-belle O'Foggarty otherwise."

"Yes, Tom. You better get to your gun; they're readying to pipe."

The old man shuffled to the pivot gun, shucking his striped cotton shirt, contentment in his leathery hard face.

A silver pipe call floated over the bay from the flagship. Chain cables stood up-and-down; tripping iron pawls clinked out the waiting seconds. A forestays'l and mizzen spanker swept aloft on the *Lawrence*; then on the *Niagara*. Chid heard the creak of the fores'l throat blocks as the gaff crept up the foremast of the *Ariel*.

"General quarters! All hands, general quarters!"

A clarion bugle took up the call; rolling marine drums at the main hatches repeated it in a mighty thunder, echoing it against the evergreen shores of Put-in Bay.

"Jibs an' tops'ls, lads! Sail-trimmers aloft; jibs an' tops'ls. Stand by to sheet home—handsome all!"

"Jib set, sir!"

"Sheet her snug; we've Gibraltar to weather! Lively!"

"Aye, lively it is, sir."

"Gunners, post! Keep formation, quartermaster. Mains'l—overhaul your braces an' bowlines handy! Topmen, away! Carpenters, get your decks doused and sanded!"

Chid cast his bucket into the orlop bin by its lanyard, drew the sharp Erie sand to the deck, scattered it fanwise where the blood would flow thickest. He could see the fleet, suddenly blossomed in the billowing white of new snow, anchors a'cat and dripping into the blue lake. One by one the ships rounded onto the southwest breeze as it came strong beyond the lee of the island; leaned gently away from it, as if tickled by it; laughing, chuckling, a little grimly—and followed the *Ariel* in single line to that watery meeting place, that place of battle, where the six British sail had luffed into the wind and stood awaiting the fleet that was built in the forest.

They were past the Middle Sister, shining like a green emerald in a

shield of blue, in the single line formation which was the battle order. The *Ariel*, in reward of her swiftness, led the line. The *Niagara*, flanked by the *Scorpion*, plunged a half-cable's length astern; beyond her the fleet—the *Lawrence* and the *Caledonia*; Almy's saucy little *Somers*; the *Porcupine*; the *Tigress*; the *Trippe*—schooners all, stretched into the wind for a mile. It's too bad, Chid thought, that Dan Dobbins was sent off for supplies in the Ohio. Too bad—well, perhaps Dobbins, who had cheated death on Erie so often, would cheat it once again.

He could see the English fleet plainly, standing straight and tall, the ships with backed yards, the schooners with killed mains'ls, only four miles away, dark against the distant blue of the Canadian shore. He marveled at them, their perfection as ships. They gleamed with new and ample paint; rigging was taut, served and tarred, splices shining black—navy style, running rigging a clean, slick, pale yellow. These were real fighting ships, as perfect as any ship of the line in the ocean service, not frontier-built hulks, armed with short-range pieces, manned by farmers and trappers and merchants. This was the Royal Navy, the might of Britain—built to rule wherever there were waves to rule.

Chid felt a sudden blind hatred for the insolent red ensigns which waved lazily from the mizzen peaks of the arrogant fleet beyond the bow. But it was quickly replaced by pride, by sudden overwhelming faith, as he turned aft and caught sight of the American ensign at the *Ariel's* mainpeak.

He glanced aft to the *Lawrence*. Her battle flag flew, that same flag which Mrs. Baxter had labored over. The flagship was the second brig in line, having chosen the powerful new *Detroit* as her own adversary. But Chid saw suddenly that the *Detroit* was not second in the British line; she led the squadron. The change in the estimated British formation was discovered at the same moment by Captain Perry. By trumpet Real Taylor ordered the *Niagara* to drop astern. Quickly the *Lawrence* surged forward. She sailed now in proud escort of the *Ariel*.

"Watch that damn' Elliot," Shad growled to Chid, drawing on his iron pipe imperturbably. "He won't like that order worth a continental. Not that young hot-head, mate. By his own calculation, *he* is the hero of this lake. Hah!—look, boy; as I told you. He's laggin' fearful, asneakin' up to wind'ard the while. By Jed, matey, the *Niagara's* spoiled the line!"

"He's backwinded by the *Lawrence*, I reckon, Tom. He can't help it."

"My eye, he can't. Elliot's a sailor, lad. By Jehovah, he's agoin' to let us run in alone!"

They were interrupted by the raucous grind of the battle rattle. At the same moment the *Lawrence* signaled a change in course of four points alee. Like the tail of a comet, the fleet followed, now directly at the distant British fleet. "Here 'tis, mate," Tom Shad said quietly and offered his horny hand. "Luck, boy."

"Luck, Tom."

The magazines were open, shot and powder were swinging in nettings to the deck. Chid could hear the militiamen in the trestle-tree barrels charge their muskets, sending home their patches with a curse. A boy brought fire from the brick galley arch, touching it to Tom Shad's newly fused match; then sluiced lake water on the remaining wood coals. Macklin came and tested the pivot, revolving the gun platform a few times, taking mock aim. "This pivot," he said patting the thirty-two in approval, "is worth any four guns of ordinary broadside, Shad. Serve her well." Shad didn't answer. His eyes were already riveted on his target, the schooner *Chippeway*, saucy and leering on the flank of the *Detroit*.

Hercule Misereau passed along the windward rail with a tall clay jug of grog and a sack of biscuits. Chid, as his mates did, downed the coarse liquor, then munched on a hard biscuit. It was something to do. Culver Coons gagged, tried to assuage the fire of the unaccustomed grog by a gulp from the sponge bucket beside the long gun. "Ninnies shouldn't drink," the cook sneered, retrieving his tin cup. "By God," Culver returned, red-faced, "they have to drink to stay alive—your rations are too lousy to eat!" It was good to laugh, to ease the tension of the wait for that first gun.

It came at noon, when the wind had died to a whisper and the lake even here offshore was calm and glassy; when the two fleets were separated by less than half a mile. It was a range-testing shot from the *Detroit*, a harmless missile. Shad swore, "Let me, sir!" Packett shook his head. "Hold fire, my man. You're long enough in the service to know you'll await orders."

"Aye, aye, sir," Shad grumbled, touching his forelock.

But it was nerve-racking waiting in the profound airless hush, taking

those testing shots while the fleet drifted slowly, slowly toward the black muzzles which stared at them like unwinking eyes of doom.

Chid hung over the low rail of the *Ariel*. He could feel again in this careful approach that unruffled calmness of Perry, admire the pure, cool nerve of him as he held fire and ghosted slowly into effective range with his pathetically light guns. The fleet was taking regular hits from the British long thirty-twos now. He could hear the balls whistling overhead, crying like swift-winged birds, the angry spent whine of long-range musket fire from the tops.

It was curiously impersonal. Chid had the distinct feeling of being only a spectator. But he felt sudden hot anger when a twelve-pound ball thudded dully into the *Ariel's* quarter. That hurt to the little schooner which he loved, which more than any other ship of the fleet was his own, somehow made him a participant.

"Half-canister range," Shad observed knowingly and spilled his pipe heel. "A smart man would open and cut up riggin' awhile."

As they turned, Shad toward his pivot gun, Chid to his clearing axes and fire buckets, they heard the bugle from the *Lawrence*. A cheer came from her decks, was echoed in the tops, and sprang from ship to ship like fire in a dry forest, reverberating along the long American battle line.

"You may open, Shad," Packett called. "Sta'board twelves, bar and chain into their sailing gear, the thirty-two into British oak."

"Aye, sir," Shad bellowed jubilantly, his grin bland as a schoolboy's, "into British oak and British hearts!"

His gun spoke, the first shot of the fleet—and before the great piece had lashed against its tackle, broadsides swept from the entire line. Lazy, acrid smoke and tongues of blood-red fire filled the air. Battle was joined at last.

Packett supported the *Lawrence* bravely. He soon saw that the strategy of Barclay was to concentrate upon the flagship and knock her—and more likely her commander—out of the action at the beginning. As the fleets closed and each ship locked with its assigned adversary, he found that the two heaviest of the enemy ships, the *Detroit* and the *Queen Charlotte*, were both arrayed against the *Lawrence*. The flagship was taking a fast, murderous concentrated fire from both. Packett could do

nothing in direct aid; for against the *Ariel* were ranged the *Chippeway* and the brig *Hunter*.

Shad's long gun, which he could aim almost like a quarter swivel, fired with the regularity of a clock tick. Macklin, glass to his eye, called the results with savage glee, shouting above the din. Nez was in the bow, sprawled on his belly, serving a musket with the calm detachment of a yokel at a turkey shoot. "Got him," Nez would croak while he re-loaded. "Now, lobster coat, jest show that weather eye o' yourn ag'in, do." And his musket would spit.

Chid had nothing to do. He felt silly picking up splinters and spreading sand while men were dying on the battered *Lawrence*. Sometimes, in the sudden lulls of firing, he could hear their shrieks, see bleeding, mangled men being lowered to the cockpit where Dr. Parsons would be making grim use of those oak tables with the leather straps. He remembered with a shudder that awful scene in the shanty office during the British raid on the naval base, heard again the rasp of the saw that had been set so perfectly, the cry of that man who was being cut up before his own eyes....

He did not want to look at the *Lawrence*. In an incredibly short time she had become almost a hulk; top hamper a shambles, fire on her fore-deck, her quarterboat a mass of splinters hanging from the davits. Like the boat of the *Blessed Cause*, in which he had tumbled the casks of prize money, thought Chid.

He sensed that Packett and Macklin were talking about the *Niagara*. She was desperately needed to engage the *Queen Charlotte* as had been planned, to relieve the flagship of one of the fanged snarling beasts which tore at her flesh. But the *Niagara* lay with mainyard backed a safe half-mile to windward, out of the fight, firing spasmodically without plan or purpose, making brave noise. Chid was aware suddenly of the tide of hatred for her which flooded the *Ariel*. "Elliot," he heard, hissed, with snarling curling lips. "Coward! Elliot, that yeller-gutted bastard!" With a curious sense of satisfaction, he saw Nez swing to the larboard rail and open a careful deliberate fire at the *Niagara*. "By God, he deserves it," a man growled, passing canister to the twelve-pounder battery. "I wish to Christ we was closer—Nez'ud lay that bastid Elliot out where he belongs."

Packett's speaking trumpet was suddenly turned to the midship deck. "Lads, stand by to close in. The commander can't take that fire much longer. Double-shot your pieces and hold your fire. Sail-trimmers, away!"

The *Ariel* surged slowly forward, moving into the terrific fray. Directly astern of the *Lawrence* she luffed and lost way. Each of her batteries now bore on an enemy. The gunners blew their matches bright and whooped as they pressed them to the touch holes.

"That did it, Tom!"

"By jing, fore an' main royal in one shot! More chain, my hearties; that's the stuff for close work."

"Raked her deck like parin' an apple! Cookie, build up your fire an' we'll give 'em hot shot."

The thick yellow smoke burned Chid's throat, coated his mouth with a medicine-tasting bitterness. He felt a splinter slice his thigh, the hot surge of blood soak his pants and trickle into his shoe. He slapped the wound, as he would have slapped a mosquito sting, and thought no more about it. There was a man down at the larboard forward twelve, tearing at his knee and cursing. The surgeon's mates clutched at him like waiting vultures; bore him moaning below. Chid spread sand on the place, kicked the severed foot overside with a sudden nausea. He wished that he could fight, not merely help, like a witless chambermaid.

They had the *Hunter* under effective fire, diverting her offense from the *Lawrence*. But even Chid could see that it was too late. The *Lawrence's* fire had been growing steadily weaker as gun after gun was dismounted. Less than two-thirds of her crew remained able to fight; nearly thirty of her one hundred and thirty-six men had been killed. He was not to know that day that he was witnessing the bloodiest naval engagement ever fought.

The *Ariel* herself now lay in a deadly cross-fire. To walk upright was to court death. Canister and grape and sweeping marine fire thundered over the little vessel. She suffered much in the rigging from the high fire of the two-deckers; her idly flapping sails were holed and ribboned. Hercule crawled forward on his belly, building a fire on the hearth, rolling round shot into it. Steve Winter took them out with tongs, molten red and hissing, inching on his elbows with them to the guns. "God-damn' that Elliot," he muttered once. The next moment Winter shud-

dered and lay still. The hot ball dropped from the tongs, rolled across the deck, leaving a scorched smoking path in the clean white pine.

He was dead when Chid crawled to him. Chid could see the clean bloodless hole of the musket ball in the forehead, over the left eye. It was a quick, perhaps painless, way to die.

"A man can do nothing greater than give his life for his country," the cook said piously as Chid dragged Winter forward.

"Don't be a damn' fool," Chid snapped, suddenly angry. "The greatest thing he can do is to stay alive and fight for his country."

He looked suddenly upward. He was almost under the deep stern overhang of the *Lawrence*. Captain Perry stood on his quarterdeck, his eyes playing over the scene of carnage unafraid, confident, somehow trusting. It surprised Chid to hear his own name suddenly called.

"Alwyn!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You're hurt, my boy." It was so like the captain.

"Nothing much. I almost forgot about it."

"Do you still have your longboat on the *Ariel*?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, ask Mr. Packett to send it to me, please."

"Aye, aye, sir."

It was curious, talking to Perry so now, remembering him that snowy night at Portersville, in his fever bed at the pest chambers. But even then, Chid recollected, creeping aft, he made you feel that he was a great man, cut of hero cloth.

Lieutenant Packett helped Chid lower the longboat over the stern. The little boat lay bobbing in the circular ripples caused by the gunfire on the calm lake. Packett cast a calculating eye over his men, his lips pursed. "I—I could run her ahead, sir," Chid offered.

Packett gave him a warm smile.

"Do so, Alwyn. As you see we're—ah, pretty busy."

Macklin, beside the commander, gave a short cackle. "Aye, busy, sir," he said witheringly. "But fighting—not deserting our ship because we're whipped."

Chid heard the sharp gasp of John Packett, saw the red anger steal over his young face. "I have known Commodore Perry less than two

months, sir," Packett said quietly, "but sufficient time to know that no action of his need ever be questioned. I shall expect your apology, sir."

Macklin scowled and mumbled quick apology, his face in shame. Chid dropped to his knees, the painter of the longboat in his teeth. Slowly he worked his way forward behind the bulwarks, passing the line outside the standing rigging, dragging the boat alongside. He could hear the sudden volley aimed at her, see the small explosions of wood splinters from the lightly built boat.

When he reached the bow he waited for the lull which always came after a heavy cannonading. Quickly, he then dodged over the rail and dropped from the bowsprit to the longboat. He gave a mighty shove against the stem—remembering suddenly those initials just inside of where he pushed—and propelled the boat under the counter of the *Lawrence*. The air above him was screaming with swift metal; cannon spit their smoke and fire only a yard above his head.

A boat crew from the flagship scrambled into the longboat.

"Where's the captain headin'?"

"Dunno, mate. But you can lay it's for the good o' the fleet. Jes', what a lickin' we're takin'!"

Perry stepped lightly down the port ladder, oblivious of the danger of exposure. He carried his blue battle flag folded neatly over his right arm, with his left he held his sword. *This is no commander deserting his ship*, thought Chid, *this is a man victorious!*

"By God! He's transferring his flag!"

"To the *Niagara*, I'll lay! She ain't hurt a hair."

"Lord," a bugler breathed, "my lips ache from tryin' to signal her in, damn' that swill-hearted Elliot!"

They pulled swiftly away from the doomed *Lawrence*. Chid could see the great gashes in her sides, the long furry splinters of the raw unseasoned pine which had gone into her planking. He found himself with an oar in his hand, pulling desperately. Marine fire showered mercilessly about them, sending savage geysers from the lake to blind them.

Perry stood in the stern sheets, unmindful of the terrific barrage which was leveled at the little boat. A flailing chain shot whistled over them, crying and moaning; he thought suddenly that whirling bar shot sounded like a whistler duck taking off from the salt marshes of Ram Island off

Noank. A lead musket ball slapped against the flat of the captain's sword, dropped dully to the stern grating. Perry shrugged, his gaze fixed ahead.

"You better sit down, sir," Chid panted, pulling hard. "They're—they're after you."

Perry did not answer. He was taking in the battle, estimating the chances of snatching victory from this horrible defeat.

"Please, sir."

But the captain remained standing; aloof, disdainful, brave beyond fear of personal danger—

They slid under the bow of the *Detroit*, under the golden figurehead of the pagan chief Tecumseh. A seaman poised his cutlass, then cast it with all his power. Chid brought his oar quickly to the toss as the lethal blade hurtled toward the standing figure. The cutlass glanced off the oar, cut cruelly into Chid's knuckles, splashed spent into the lake.

"Please," Chid cried. "Sit down, sir! Get under the gunwales!"

"Easy, Alwyn," Perry smiled.

"I've got the right," Chid cried hotly. "Once—in that fire—long ago—you said I saved your life. If I did, your life is mine now. I beg you to take protection, sir!"

"Well spoke, lad," a seaman grunted behind him.

Perry looked at Chid oddly and suddenly sat down. As he did so a ball screamed a few inches over his head. He turned suddenly pale, looked at Chid with queer understanding. "That's twice, Chid," he said quietly.

The yellow powder smoke lay thick and choking on the water. Wreckage lay in their path, shattered spars and great sodden bundles of canvas, rigging—entwined yards, the *Lawrence's* crushed yawl boat, two bodies, slowly turning—the swill of battle.

They could feel a faint stirring of the wind as the longboat pulled clear of the engagement. A deafening bombardment roared from the long battle line. The *Caledonia* lay parallel to the British line, firing her small ineffective twelves into the tough live-oak-sheathed enemy brigs; the schooners, suddenly alive under the new breeze, darted in and out, pouring iron into an enemy which they already believed victorious.

Behind them the *Lawrence* was burning, her foremast already collapsed over her shattered bow. "Waste," thought Chid, "waste—like that

coffin we made for Old Man Tatum. Months of sweat and ache and grief and hunger and sickness, prime timber, iron—human life—destroyed in thirty minutes.” But he thrilled to the lazy swirl of the ensign above the rising black smoke. It was not waste, not to keep that flag flying. No ship was dead, destroyed, while that flag still flew above her.

They cheered as the captain climbed the ladder to the deck of the *Niagara*. Pipes shilled suddenly, the main braces slacked, headsails filled gently, and the new flagship began to close to the battle. Slowly, ominously, she ghosted in, gun ports open and the yawning mouths of twenty fresh guns, served by twenty fresh crews, eager to spit their red hate at the enemy...and from the fore-royal truck flew the bold flag of a bold warrior: Don't Give Up the Ship.

The longboat clung under the lee of the *Niagara*, moving with her. Abreast of the *Ariel* Chid slid silently into the lake. He swam swiftly to the schooner, curiously grateful for the cool, clean water on his dirty bloody body. As he climbed hand-over-hand to the deck, he heard a distant terrific rending crash, then cheers from the deck of the *Ariel*.

“Tom done it! Ya-aa-h! Tom Shad, what a shot!”

Chid saw then, peeping over the rail, that the *Queen Charlotte*, moving under the new breeze, had locked bowsprits with the *Detroit*. The two great vessels lay entwined and unmanageable—and as he watched, the *Niagara* moved slowly upon them under cover of a murderous raking fire from both her batteries.

“Shad slang a barrel full o’ chain at the *Queen’s* heads’ls whilst she was passin’ o’ the *Detroit*,” Nez told him. “She got out o’ hand, like you see. I reckon we’ll close now, too.”

The call was passed along the deck. On their bellies, the sail-trimmers sheeted home the main and stays’l. Beside the *Ariel*, whispering at their bows of victory to be snatched from defeat, the Lake Erie fleet moved in for the kill.

The concussion of the mighty salvos staggered Chid. Broadside after broadside thundered from the embattled ships. He could not understand how hulls could take such grueling punishment and remain afloat. The little *Ariel* shrieked as the searing metal poured into her body. But still she lived, lived to return the hurts, savagely, vengefully, almost joyously....

Lieutenant Macklin suddenly clutched at his throat and fell beside the pivot gun. Chid crawled to his place. He knew the gun, had built the platform. He was proud of its steadiness under fire, the ease with which he could swing it and aim it by the stout bar inserted into the wooden staple which Paph North had growled so about.

He wanted desperately to aim at one of the tops, to destroy a nest of those murdering red-coated marines. Somehow, he hated the marines most of all. He wondered if George Lefferts was on one of the vessels.

"Lower, boy," Tom Shad sang lightly. "We'll squeeze some hot shot clean through that *Queen's* planking, roll 'em plumb inter her magazine, by Jehovah!"

"Lower she is, Tom!" Chid knew the weakest spots in the frame. The pivot gun was aimed at one now.

The explosion drowned all other sound, deafened the ears for minutes after. But Chid always reckoned that shot of his and Tom's was the last cast of the dice. He watched with curious impersonality the deluge of shattered ship and torn human bodies which rained upon the *Queen Charlotte*. He watched in wonderment a great thirty-two-pounder pitch its ton of iron forty feet into the air, fall twisting slowly, like an autumn leaf, carrying heavy spars and stout rope in its path. The hot blast swept past him, leaving his flesh seared; it touched sudden crackling fire to the tumbled wrecked deck of the fouled *Detroit*.

A bugle sounded dully from the British flagship; an officer with a bloody canvas bandage over one eye waved a small white silk handkerchief from the quarterdeck of the *Queen Charlotte*.

"Cease fire!"

The trumpet call echoed down the battle line. "Cease fire!" "Cease fire!"

The stillness was strange, heavy. It was curiously moving, almost tear-provoking, to see that small, immaculate figure alone on the quarterdeck of the *Lawrence*, hands clasped, head raised to the heavens, the full lips murmuring words not meant for man. . . .

"Cease fire!" Packett's young voice broke.

"Aye, aye, sir," Shad cried. To Chid he whispered slyly, "But I'll keep my match aglowin', mate."

Through the clearing smoke Chid watched the torn, beribboned red

ensigns fall slowly, caress the bowed British heads. He glanced expectantly along the ragged battle line standing stark and wounded against the distant shore of Canada. But no cheer came from the victorious ships.

Victory had been too terrible, too gory, for jubilation.

Chid was stopping shot holes with oakum and pine battens in the after-hold when he felt the *Ariel* heel to the wind. He heard the magazine lock being opened again, then the ominous rumble of the pivot gun as it revolved on its cannon balls on the deck above.

He met Nez at the ladder of the main hatch. There was laughter in Nez's eyes, anticipation. He was finished with one chore, keen to be off on the next. "It's just a go-by fer me, Chid"—yes, that was Nez Nott.

"Why are we under way again?" Chid asked.

"We ain't done yet," Nez chuckled. "A couple o' British longboats loaded up with picked bigwigs and lit out for the Canady shore. They got nigh two miles away afore some'un discovered o' them. We got orders from the flagship to go fetch 'em back."

"What's so funny about it?"

"Why, I jest like the cuteness o' it, Chid. You can't blame a man for trying to get away from where he don't want to be, can you? Tom Shad sez with that pivot gun he can pick 'em off easy's peggin' rocks on turtles. The longboats is tryin' to make a schooner that was headin' east from Malden."

Shad was making elaborate preparations, choosing his round shot with professional care, hefting them for weight and roundness. Chid finished calking the last shot hole. He could hear the swish of the water just outside the planking, then the squeal of blocks as topsails were set. He climbed to the deck, blinking in the bright afternoon sunshine.

Tom Shad was restowing his shot in disgust. "They got to the schooner, damn 'em," he growled, "an' the captain he give orders I ain't to fire on her. Now ain't that a howdedo, mate?"

Chid focused his eyes on the fleeing schooner, shading his eyes against the brilliant path of the lowering sun.

"Why, she's a Bermuda rigger, Nez!"

"She is, Chid. And damn hard to catch."

"The only one on the lake, Nez."

"I reckon."

"Nez," Chid said quietly, "I reckon we look hard enough, we could see some friends of ours—Antoine and Moses Leet, your boys from Utica. . . ."

"By God, Chid, an' Mary Leet."

"A-yep," Chid gulped, "and Mary Leet."

Chapter Twenty-four

CHID WAS GRATEFUL that Lieutenant Packett knew about the *Lion*. It would have taken vital time to convince some other commander that the little peak-headed schooner which winged so swiftly toward the guns of Fortress Malden carried fellow Americans, that she must not be fired upon. But Packett understood, and time was spared for Chid, precious time which he needed—for it was a sailing race, a battle of straining canvas and taut rigging, and the *Ariel* had suffered horribly.

Unbidden, Chid took charge of the repair work which must be done to make the *Ariel* again sail fast. He alone knew how to fish ruptured spars so that they could bear the press of full canvas once more; only a shipbuilder would know how to anchor severed backstays, where in that torn frame to find solid wood so that lead blocks and carvels and cleats and fairleads could become useful again. Chid alone had the weapon which could triumph in this final battle which must be bloodless; he alone knew how to use it.

He had in Nez his only ally. Together they chopped open the deck—no longer the holystoned white of smooth pine, but now stained in darkening red patches, smeared with disgusting caking clots. They exposed rough-hewn sturdy deck beams, making ragged holes fore and aft of them. "Pass your backstay tails under the beam," Chid cried, hurrying the sail-trimmers. "Pad with double canvas—it'll hold your topmasts in!" He did not wait there. There were other holes to be cut forward, aweather—and alee, for that time when the *Ariel* would have to tack. As he chopped at new holes furiously, he heard the sudden hum of the tautened stay as the bowed topmast and the awful urge of the great billowing sails strained against it.

He shaped long pine fishing planks for the fractured fore-gaff, hol-

lowing the insides to a rough fit with a routing-adze. They did not grip the spar faithfully, wood to wood; it was not the proud work of a journeyman shipwright, a foreman—but it had to suffice. He left the two Delaware Indians serving the wound with tarred spunyarn. He was driving a shattered shieve out of a jammed jib sheet block when he heard the foresail creep up the mast on its repaired gaff; felt the eager, quickened gait of the *Ariel* as she accepted the drive of still another sail.

He was not worried about the *Ariel*. He knew that she could outsail anything on the lake, even a Bermuda schooner. All she needed was honest full sail, courage at the helm, and the understanding nursing of one who loved her.

He did not know how John Packett planned to take the schooner. That was Packett's job, the Navy's job. All that he could do was to make the *Ariel* whole and swift again so that she could catch this reeling ship which held the only thing that he valued in the world.

For him those few escaping men were not important. He could understand that they might be to Packett, to Captain Perry. For him the victory was Mary, to save her again from her captors, from oblivion in the ranks of an enemy which now faced defeat and starvation, which must retreat into the wilderness of Canada, an army to whom hostages might be valuable....

"By Gee," Nez cried at his side, "I traveled fast before, Chid, but never like this. What do you reckon we're doin'?"

"It doesn't matter. How fast's that Britisher goin'? That's what counts."

"Consid'able," Nez answered. "She's scuddin' into shore. We'll have to head her off inside three miles or go in an' take her from under the fort."

"Tell John Packett to hang a driver on the main, Nez. Tell him to set a bonnet—and water sails if he has 'em."

"Them's mighty windbags, Chid. She won't stand 'em."

"Go ahead, Nez. I know what I'm doing, I know what I'm fighting for."

He cut two more backstays into the deck, making ready for the great sails which were being sent up from the sail bins. They fluttered aloft,

flapping crazily, then suddenly stiffened as the sheets drew them hard and stiff before the brisk quartering wind.

He could pause now to look at the *Lion*. She sailed not so far ahead, stretching down the lake shore, white plumes of hard-spanked spume dashing from under her bows. He could see figures on her deck—red-coated marines, blue-shirted seamen; the sail-trimmers laying onto a boom tackle, coaxing another inch an hour from the plunging vessel.

The *Ariel's* men were suddenly about him, purposeful—looking grim as muskets and pikes were handed to them by the armorer. Yes—that's about all that John Packett could do, Chid thought—board and trust that the Americans on her would either keep out of the way or help.

He could see the deep indentation in the coast behind which the guns of Malden must already be shotted, the garrison alert and waiting to protect its own. But he could see, too, that the *Ariel* was matching the racing *Lion* stride for stride, gaining, creeping slowly into her creamy wake.

Steadily the *Ariel* stole upon her enemy. She creaked and groaned in her straining hull, complained bitterly at the hurt of the cruel straps which bound her to the wind. But she winged swiftly on, with deadly purpose.

"I reckon," Tom Shad observed, "them Britishers what skeddaddled was mostly marines. Ain't it like the sons o' bitches?"

There was definite overlap of the two vessels now, the *Ariel* was in the essential windward position. Less than a mile ahead reared the mainland of Canada, a headland behind which was the protecting river and the formidable might of Malden.

He wondered when Packett would give the order to close, to lay the *Lion* by the board and swarm over those clean decks, splatter them with blood and gore. By God, Chid thought, I've seen enough carnage today!

You'd think that the *Lion* would quit, save more death and maiming. She was without armament, a helpless ship, her one weapon of speed now torn from her. Still, there was one chance. Only one short reeling mile ahead there was victory for her. He didn't blame her for trying, for risking the fire of that thirty-two which she must plainly see, for

chancing the murderous thrusts of those keen glistening battle-axes and pikes....

John Packett paced his narrow quarterdeck in a black quandary. What to do? If he could only be sure about those American prisoners. Were they below, reasonably well protected from his attack? If so, were they confined, chained—unable to escape if he had to sink her? Would he kill them, merely exchange British lives for American? And there was that pretty girl, too....

But he made the only decision which his service permitted. "At least," he mused bitterly, "I'm not firing that murderous pivot gun into them."

"Quartermaster, you may veer to board!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Gently the *Ariel* turned toward the *Lion*, toward those white faces which lined the rail, those red- and blue-clothed figures which suddenly reached for muskets and small arms, for weapons spurned by gallant ships, weapons valued only by man.

If Packett only knew. If he could only be sure about those countrymen of his. One shot from the pivot gun would settle it, he was sure. No hand weapon would dare to challenge its red tongue. It was criminal—almost—to order his boarders away, send them to suffering and maiming and death once again today.

Still, that headland was less than five minutes of sailing away. Those British officers—marines, he guessed—free in Canada, could lead again, become again dangerous to other of his countrymen.

The trouble, he knew, was that the enemy knew of his quandary, depended upon it to gain that small bit of time they needed.

Wearily Packett turned forward and raised his trumpet. There was no choice but to board, cut into flesh and bone to victory....

Something whizzed suddenly past his head, singing angrily. Quickly he turned. Over his head, embedded deeply in the great main boom, was a double-bitted ax, still quivering—and from the helve there fluttered a small white paper, tied tightly to it with codline.

Packett unfolded the note in wonderment. He was suddenly aware

of Chid Alwyn at his side, the boy unmindful of the sanctity of his quarterdeck.

"Only one man in the world could throw a double-bitted ax like that, sir," Alwyn rasped at him. "A Canuck—Antoine Marestière, sir."

"One of the Americans?"

"One of the finest, sir. Read—read the note."

Packett read the two lines, then passed the note to Alwyn. After all, he too had a stake in this engagement.

We are all aft of the mainmast, in the hold. Do not hold your fire because of us. Mary Leet.

Packett sighed gratefully. "Shad," he trumpeted, "rake her decks with cannister—for'ard of the mainmast, mind! And Alwyn—if you'll be good enough to get off my quarterdeck . . . !"

It was almost funny to see the yellow-haired boy redden and stumble forward. He was a good lad. Packett had been in the service since the Tripoli affair, but he'd learned something from that boy today; new tricks, a sudden realization that the weapons of war were not only powder and ball and steel blade.

The pivot gun had to fire only once. It did not surprise Packett; no enemy of military perception would require its truth to be spoken a second time. The red ensign crept slowly down from the main truck. But Packett had called "Cease fire" for the second time that day as the signalman stepped to the halyards. There was a thin line, imperceptible at times, beyond which war became murder.

With a smile he nodded to the impatient yellow-haired shipwright.

"Yes," he said, "you may go with the boarding boat—aft of the mainmast, in the hold, my lad!"

"Thank you, sir."

How quickly, thought Packett, they remember what they are really fighting for. Or, more likely, they had never forgotten.

Chapter Twenty-five

THE MINUTE GUNS had ceased their solemn requiem over the twilight shadows of Put-in Bay. All the long bright afternoon the flag-draped barges had plied between the two great fleets, intermingled in peaceful anchorage, and the wooded island. Sixty-eight bodies, true brothers before God at last, rested side by side in the common grave—each beneath the flag of the eagle or the flag of the lion according to his choice in life. The grave was a lonely sandy mound drawing the purple shadows from the vivid Erie sunset. The stirring lake breeze held the tang of autumn, whispered faintly in the dense evergreens.

Peace.

Yes, thought Chid, peace; peace on Erie at last. He would never forget those measured solemn minute guns—nor the quiet sober words which Oliver Hazard Perry had spoken over that raw red mound. "There is no victor, there is no vanquished. In that future before us we shall look back on this day as a uniting, a fusing—not as a day when two great nations were tried but as a day when a great race was preserved...."

Peace—peace on Erie.

They walked slowly to the mole where the *Ohio* lay moored. His arm was strong about Mary. She felt so small, so soft, so yielding. They did not talk. He could understand her tears, the quiet emotion which had made her sob as the funeral boats had landed their heroes at the burying place on the beautiful, now hallowed, island.

They paused at the mole, lingering in the warm evening. Dan Dobbins spoke from his quarterdeck, his gruffness softened. "We sail in five minutes, Chid."

"I'll be ready," Chid said.

There was not much more to say. He had told Mary all as the *Ariel* had sailed from Malden shore. She knew now that he loved her as life itself. Their kisses had been sweet, promising; their plans were made.

"Take care of Mrs. Slinker till I come back," said Chid.

"Of course, Chid. We shall be together, busy in the hospital, for a long time. Watch over father, Chid. He's well again, but he's not young any more—only in his heart."

"I reckon," said Chid, "that's the place to be young in."

He drew her into the shadow of a great spruce. His lips searched eagerly for hers.

"Forever, Mary, my Mary..."

"My darling. Forever, Chid..."

The *Ohio*, her supplies unloaded onto the fleet, ghosted into the lake. She caught the new breeze off Gibraltar Point and reached swiftly east to Black Rock. Chid stood at the rail, his gaze fixed on the fast disappearing shore of Put-in Bay. He could no longer see the dear figure, the waving arm—but he could see for a long time the tall spruce under which they had stood saying those last lingering words.

Nez Nott slipped silently to his side, spitting reflectively into the lake. With him was Antoine.

"Chid," Nez said, "did you know that George Lefferts is in the brig for'ard?"

"No."

"Well, he is, in irons. The Master-at-Arms turned him over to Peleg Ruskin, the U. S. Marshal; him an' his money. He had nigh onto thirty thousan' dollars in good paper when they took him off'n the *Lion*."

"Ah t'ink," observed Antoine, "dat skonk she get what she t'ink she give de odder mans, hein? Ah t'ink is good, me."

"Antwine," Nez grinned, "you speak when yer spoke to before yer betters. Don't forget I licked you good an' proper at splittin' the chip this mornin'."

"Is tease, Ah t'ink," Antoine laughed. "You hit de main boom wit' de hax, hein? Ah t'ink no, Nez, hol' fran', me!"

"That warn't nuthin', Antwine. But, say, where'd you cast that ax from anyways?"

"F'om de hwinder in de littley *Lion* boat. Ah steal de hax, bah Gar."

"Well," Nez grunted, "'twas a pretty good cast, I got to admit. But naow, you take a shoulder knife, honed up keen an' cast by a expert..."

They went below arm in arm. He would see a lot more of them. They were going to the same place that he was, a step nearer that beckoning Otter where, Nez insisted, the hills had no valleys, the rum casks no bottoms, and the women no virtue.

They were good friends, tried and true. He respected them, and they respected him. He reckoned that that was a mighty essential ingredient of friendship, even of a man's friendship for himself.

Peleg Ruskin met him as he turned from the lighted wardroom to the berthing alley.

"Mr. Alwyn."

"Hello, Mr. Ruskin. I'm sorry I couldn't see you before."

"Well, I ain't, sir. You was on damn important business, for me an' sevril million other folks. Well, I got the paper, all ready to sign. Ahem! Now—whereas this is a true and faithful account of what transpired on a voyage of privateering..."

"Where do you want me to sign?"

"Why, here if you please, Mr. Alwyn." The marshal's finger found the white space at the end of the cramped writing.

Chid signed. It was a good trouble to be shut of at last. It was a freedom of another kind that Ruskin was giving him; a kind that you did not have to earn, a kind that was every man's right if he was an honest worthy citizen.

"Thank you, Mr. Alwyn. Now about the prize money. I don't rightly know how much it will figure out to, but the court will decide an' distribute it in due course."

"Do we get that?"

"Certainly. It's yours, ain't it? But don't be impatient—likely 'twill take consid'erable time before you see it."

They shook hands. Chid went forward and began to undress, tak-

ing care not to disturb the bandage which Dr. Parsons had bound around that healing splinter wound.

Peleg Ruskin appeared suddenly at his side.

"Mr. Alwyn, your address. I nigh forgot it. We'll want to know where to forward that money."

"Well, Mr. Ruskin," Chid said, "Well—I guess Erie, Pennsylvania, care of the Brown and Alwyn Shipyard. But I reckon not for a while yet. There's still a war to be won before a man can commence chasing his own plans. You better address me at the United States Navy Yard, Lake Champlain, care of Noah Brown."

"Thank you, Mr. Alwyn. I'm right proud to have made your acquaintance."

"Good night, Mr. Ruskin."

He was utterly tired. But tonight he did not sleep in blackness—his sleep was gentle, paced by pleasant dreams, provoking, challenging and promising.

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



134 660

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY